TECH GUIDE: HOT NEW DIRECT-VIEW TVs

# NCORPORATING SOUND&IMAGE NAGAZINE

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- **▲ Snell Satellites**
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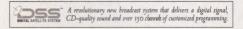
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The engineers at Hitachi have achieved what few can do: create a camcorder that is innovative and yet, affordable. Let's take a closer look at the camcorder that proudly calls itself ULTRAVISION!

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Clarity and detail are critical to making the picture look the best it can. The ULTRAVISION VMH710A achieves over 400 lines of resolution, more than 42% better than TV programs! The VMH710A records images 63% better than VHS, VHS-C and 8mm standard resolution camcorders, which achieve no more than 250 lines of resolution. And you'll see that difference on whatever TV you play the videotape on. ULTRAVISION sound quality is Hi-Fi stereo, microphone and recording. Better than 90db of audio quality is achieved!

#### A.A.I.T. AND D.S.P. III

How a camera interprets the image it sees makes the difference between ordinary and extraordinary! Hitachi engineers developed years ago a technology that utilized the benefits of microprocessors. Called Advanced Artificial Intelligence Technology (A.A.I.T.), the software controls the

image coming in through the lens for focus, white balance, aperture (iris) functioning, high-speed shutter, backlight compensation and wind noise. The VMH710A employs a third generation 16-bit Digital Signal Processor (DSP) to regulate these functions rapidly. The result to you are videotapes that are color accurate and detailed. Yes, your memories are preserved with the quality they deserve, ULTRAVISION quality!

AA BATTERY BACKUP... A FIRST!
Many camcorder users will tell you how frustrating it is to run out of power when you most need it. Hitachi's engineers recognized the need and solved a major hassle for all of us! The VMH710A has the capability of inserting 6 AA alkaline batteries for an additional 50 minutes of power! AA Batteries are sold almost everywhere, so you are just a store away from more power to continue those precious memories!

#### 4 COLOR EVF, EIS AND INSTANT ZOOM

Ease-of-use is a must with any camcorder. The VMH710A has been designed to be user-friendly. We see in color; the viewfinder of the VMH710A is color so that no details of a scene will be missed! To keep your videotapes stable, Hitachi engineers developed an Electronic Image Stabilizer (EIS) that maintains picture quality while smoothing out any extra motion. Using angular motion sensors, the camcorder will determine if you are shaking the camcorder and respond properly. And

Instant Zoom is just a button push away! No zoom is faster; wherever you have zoomed to, Instant Zoom takes you 1.5x closer instantly! That's valuable when recording a moment that comes quickly! All controls are conveniently located on the end of the camcorder, for easy access when you need them!

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#### CONCLUSION

These are just a few of the thoughtful and innovative features that make the VMH710A a breakthrough in performance. Visit your local Authorized Dealer today and experience for yourself the quality and value of the ULTRAVISION VMH710A! And see for yourself how Hitachi engineers made a quality camcorder affordable to you!

For more information about the Hitachi VMH710A please call: 1-800-HITACHI CIRCLE NO. 56 ON READER SERVICE CARD



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Following is a sampling of Larry's works.
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of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Erato,
flCA/BMG. CBS/Sony, Koss Classics,
Marco Polo, New World, Crystal, Peregrine.
Pro Arte. Summit, Centaur, Orfeo,
Musical Heritage Society.







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MAGAZINE





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**COVER PHOTO** Tony Cordoza









### Are You Experienced?

HOME THEATER IS THE HOT BUTTON IN

consumer-electronics circles these days. The technology and talk, the sales-floor price quotes and the reader queries, the choices and the online



chat all center on the convergence of video and audio. DBS systems and their generous entertainment packages, 5.1-channel surround sound, big-screen TVs, powered subwoofers, digital videodiscs, digital VCRs, digital cable—so much of it is focused as finely as a laser beam or a line-doubled image on the phenomenon we call Home Theater. ■ What is Home Theater? Not a TV with built-in speakers. Not wine, or popcorn, or couches clad in Italian leather. Not cute little speakers that look like Ming vases. Not picture windows, celebrity architects, or bearskin rugs. It's not about filler. It's about substance. ■ Home Theater is about hardware—TV sets, VCRs, laserdisc players, speakers, surround-sound processors, A/V receivers, multichannel amps, and the technologies that make them work. It's about getting the most for your money whether you're spending \$1,000 or \$100,000. It's about clean, sharp images with accurate colors and soundtracks that sound like real life. Because, when you get right down to it, Home Theater is really about the experience. Living vicariously through the genius of Spielberg and Scorsese, Wilder and Huston, Cameron, Bertolucci, and Merchant-Ivory. Watching the tears dry on Michelle Pfeiffer's face. Racing headlong on the knife's edge with Harrison Ford during a Blade Runner's last assignment. Sprinting low to the ground through primeval woods with Daniel Day-Lewis at your side. Feeling the Enterprise's engines straining all around you. Gasping in wonder at dinosaurs, aliens, or the spark in Ingrid Bergman's eyes. ■ You need hardware to enjoy these experiences to the fullness of their potential. And this is where the hardware is. Welcome to VIDEO, circa 1995. We'll never slight camcorders and all of their accoutrements (check out this issue's

jam-packed "Video File," which begins on page 61), and we'll watch closely

what makes our pulses race. Plug in, turn on, watch out.

as multimedia blossoms as an entertainment medium. But Home Theater is

Bill Wofe

#### VIDEO

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Mitsubishi 35" color television provided by Jerry's Audio Video of Phoenix, AZ.

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#### DISC FACTOR

I recently purchased Pioneer's CLD-D703, but now, after reading about the new, upcoming digital videodisc (DVD) format, I'm concerned about my investment. Can a conventional LD player be upgraded to read DVDs, or will the LD format eventually be phased out completely? Also, can I hook up an external RF demodulator to my LD player to accommodate Dolby Surround AC-3?

> Ralph Calabria East Brunswick, NJ

About 4 months ago, I purchased Pioneer's CLD-D703 laserdisc player. Only a month or two later, however, I started reading about Dolby AC-3 and that a LD player must be equipped with it to enjoy the new technology's benefits. Then I read that all but the least expensive Pioneer LD player is equipped with AC-3-but my owner's manual makes no mention of it. Have I been caught in the worst of all situations-buying the last model right before a technology breakthrough? If this is indeed my situation, will the quality of AC-3 improve over time? If I must bear the cost of upgrading, how long should I wait until the technology matures?

> Louis Z. Gombos Fort Collins, CO

An LD player can't be upgraded for DVD playback. LD players should be around well into the next century, however, and they'll remain extremely valuable for movie enthusiasts: Over 8,000 titles are available on LD, and it'll take years for DVD's "library" to grow that large.

An LD player must have an RF output in order to be compatible with Dolby Surround AC-3 laserdiscs and AC-3 demodulator/surround-sound decoders; you must have all three to enjoy the benefits of AC-3. The D703 doesn't have this RF output; all but the least expensive of Pioneer's new-for-'95 LD players include it.

The first generation of AC-3 hardware is very expensive, so it should be sophisticated if not mature; we're



currently conducting a hands-on test of it and will report our findings in an upcoming issue. We'll also determine whether AC-3 software makes good use of the technology's potential and, as soon as it's available, whether the second, more affordable generation of AC-3 hardware performs up to the —Ed. technology's potential.

#### **SMUDGE ITO**

I'm your regular, run-of-the-mill laserdisc addict and have been enjoying LDs for 10 years now. After reading "Laser's Personal Best" [April 1995], I bought the THX-certified My Fair Lady. I agree that the supplemental items are neat, but-following a trend I've noticed-the image is so smudged that you can't see the actors' eyes. This seems to be the case with all of the THX, Columbia TriStar, and recent MGM/UA discs I've seen.

> VIDEO welcomes your comments and suggestions Mail Video, "Feedback" 1633 Broadway, 45th floor New York, NY 10019 Email VideoMag@aol.com Fax 212.767.5615

Lately, broadcast TV has looked cleaner on my Pulsar front-projection system than many LDs. Now I rent LDs first, purchasing only those that truly look good. The disc distributors' Quality Control departments should keep copies of MGM's The Boy Friend and LIVE's The Piano around for reference-as far as I'm concerned, they're everything that LD image quality is all about.

> **Gabriel Bazurto** Tucson

We haven't noticed this "trend" (see "Eyes on the Prize," page 26, for another take on THX's discs), though some older film stocks aren't as sharp as current stock. -Ed.

#### DREAM REAVER

I feel that the 12-inch laserdisc is being overlooked as a potential recording medium. A 12-inch recordable LD could use MPEG-2 for standard play and MPEG-1 for extended play. How many hours of MPEG-1 programming could fit on a 12-inch LD?

> **Paul Riley** Seal Beach, CA

Technical editor Lance Braithwaite replies: Players that record on 12-inch discs exist today for commercial use.

The hardware costs about \$35,000, blank discs about \$200 apiece; the discs aren't compatible with conventional LD players designed for home use, however. A 12-inch disc that uses the same pit-spacing as conventional analog-video 12-inch discs would probably hold about 4 to 6 hours of MPEG-1 programming; make the pits smaller and move them closer together and you could probably increase the disc's capacity dramatically. But if you're going to dream, why dream about MPEG-1? At best, its image quality equals that of conventional VHS tape.

#### MEASURE ME IN ST. LOUIS

I recently installed a new VCR on a shelf previously occupied (over an 8year period) by four other VCRs. I never had a problem operating any of the other four from my customary seat on my sofa, with the VCR's remote sitting on the armrest. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that my new VCR wouldn't respond to its remote when it was on the armrest. So I made a series of measurements: At a distance of 101 inches, the four older VCRs responded to their remotes at an angle of 56 degrees from a line perpendicular to the sensor window. My new VCR only responded when the remote was within 46 degreesthat's an 18-percent reduction in the range of operation! I hope my tale prevents others from assuming that the range of operation for all remote controls is identical.

> Seymour Fox, Ph.D St. Louis

#### SPAGHETTI BOSS

You and Ken Korman were mistaken when you said that Once Upon a Time in the West was the only Sergio Leone Western not to star Clint Eastwood ["Editor's Choice," March 1995, "Feedback," May 1995]: Leone's Duck You Sucker (1972; AKA A Fistful of Dynamite) starred Rod Steiger and James Coburn. A severely edited 121-minute version is occasionally broadcast on TNT and is available as an MGM/UA tape; Image offers a

138-minute letterboxed laserdisc. The full, uncut 158-minute version is unavailable at this time.

> John H. McCarthy Carbondale, PA

Allen Pasternak, of Houston, also noted our error.

#### LOGO JAM

I agree wholeheartedly with Walter Olesky ["Logos Drive Me," "Feedback," April 1995]: I've had a satellite system for 8 years, and I've always refused to buy programming that has a channel-identification logo plastered all over the picture. I wonder if the artists that create the programming know their work is being defaced?

> Bonar Law Hamilton, Ontario

#### CONTACT

I'm looking for information about a Recoton TV antenna. How can I contact them?

> Elias Herrero Jr. New Holland, PA

Contact Recoton at 800.223.6009.

--Ed.

#### ET TU, ROGER?

You folks could use some remedial training in Roman numerals: Both the April and May 1995 issues had nonsensical numerals for the volume on the title page-specifically, "XVIV" was used to represent the number 19. "XIX" is the correct usage. Also, you had three goofs last year: In July, September, and November, you used "XVII" instead of "XVIII." Most readers don't care what the volume is, but a few of us librarians keep records on these things!

#### Roger Blaine

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Slow day in the library, eh? But seriously, we'll redouble our efforts to publish accurate volume information.

--Ed.

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# News & Notes in Home Theater & Multimedia

#### 0000 second course

Sony has followed RCA into the DSS derby by introducing three systems, all of which will be available this summer. Suggested retail prices for the single-output SAS-BS1 (shown at right), dual-output SAS-BD1, and the loaded SAS-AD1 are \$749, \$849, and \$949 (before installation), respectively.

All three systems come with a receiver, a remote control, and an oval, 18-inch aluminum dish. The dish has a rounded low-noise-blocker (LNB) arm, said to prevent dropouts due to an accumulation of snow or debris, and the Signal Seeker LED, which simplifies installation by beaming steadily when the dish is optimally aligned. The Express Navigator on-screen guide, which can be customized, is said to be easy to nav-

igate thanks to the receiver's 32-bit processing. The optional MRD-D1 multiroom kit (\$200) has RF outputs that can feed five TV sets, inputs for two video sources, and cable-box and antenna connections.

The AD-1 has two standout features: a timer for unattended recording (event and day specifics weren't set at presstime), and a sophisticated learning remote control. The remote uses a track ball to navigate the on-screen guide and emits RF as well as infrared commands. Other system features include two audio outputs and a 9-pin low-speed data port.

Dual-output dishes can be connected to two receivers simultaneously. Sony will sell two receivers separately—the loaded SAT-A1 has a suggested retail price of \$750, the SAT-B1 an SRP of \$650.

—Bill Wolfe



Number of shows Fox had in Nielsen's Top 50 for the 30-week 1994—95 season (Beverly Hills, 90210).

#### bill and coup

A major piece of telecommunications deregulation legislation is being considered by Congress, and, if passed, it could fundamentally change the TV landscape. S-652, introduced by Senator Larry Pressler (R, South Dakota), proposes to allow TV stations to deploy six standard-resolution channels in

the space tentatively allocated for one HDTV channel. Passage of the bill would also allow companies that own a chain of TV stations to increase their reach from 25 to 35 percent of the United States. In addition, passage would allow for-

eign companies to own American TV or radio stations; currently, foreign investors are limited to a 25-percent stake. Finally, passage would enable TV stations to own cable franchises, while telephone companies would gain more freedom to provide programming services over phone wiring. The bill's sponsors hope to win passage by July 4, but the Clinton Administration opposes major parts of it, including the deregulation of non-basic cable service and the lack of provisions prohibiting telephone companies from buying cable systems.

-Arthur Brodsky



#### 0000 dvd dance

The volatile digital-videodisc status quo is changing more rapidly than the "motivation" of characters on Melrose Place. While the two-sided 10-gigabyte format sponsored by Toshiba/Time Warner is supported by a formidable array of consumer electronics hardware manufacturers as well as MCA and MGM/UA, Sony/Philips' single-sided, two-layer 7.4-GB format is now supported by a large number of CD-ROMplayer manufacturers as well as Philips-owned Magnavox, Marantz, Bang & Olufsen, and Grundig and Sony home-entertainment companies, including Columbia TriStar. Other DVD developments:

• Sony/Philips claim that Toshiba/Time Warner's two-sided disc is impractical for multimedia applications due to its in-



ability to access data from both sides of a disc in real-

• Matsushita, an early supporter of the Toshiba/Time Warner format, announced details on a single-sided, two-layer 9-GB DVD based on Toshiba's compression scheme but appears to be far from demonstrating the technology.

"Blue-chip" multimedia companies Apple, Compaq, Hewlett-Packard, IBM, and Microsoft said they won't be choosing between the competing formats and urged both camps to come together to present a single format. Initial responses from both the Toshiba/Time Warner and Sony/ Philips camps weren't encouraging, but they could be just the first tentative steps in a complex mating ritual. Stay —Paul Gluckman 填 tuned.

#### 0000 tale of the tape

One new detail regarding JVC's upcoming D-VHS format has surfaced since the initial story broke ["Data Retrieval," "Feedback," June 1995]. While D-VHS decks will initially require conventional S-VHS tape for digitalbitstream recording, new formulation of D-VHS tape should appear soon after the first D-VHS hardware hits in mid-'96. D-VHS tape will be thinner than S-VHS tape and will offer up to 7 hours of digital record/play time.

D-VHS (the D stands for "Data," not "Digital") will be able to record the compressed

output signals of virtually any device with a digital-bitstream output, including computers, digital videodiscs, and DSS receivers. JVC says that they will provide a compatible bitstream interface for all future digital-compression formats. A D-VHS deck won't decompress the bitstream signal or offer digital-to-analog conversion, however; that duty must be performed by an outboard decoder (such as a "settop box") or by circuitry built into another component (such as a future digital TV). D-VHS VCRs will be "backward-compatible" with conventional VHS and S-VHS tapes.

—Peter Barry

0000 cybersports

Ever wake up in a cold sweat because your favorite baseball team played a late game and you snoozed through the pivotal ninth inning . . . which included a triple play, an inside-thepark home run, and an especially snappy one-liner by Vin Scully? Need to hunker down with all of the details? Make the leap to cyberspace-to the ESPNet Sports Zone, specifically.

Unveiled on the World Wide Web over the NCAA's Final Four weekend last April, Zone (http://ESPNET. SportsZone.com, formerly known as Satchel Sports Web) provides up-to-theminute scores, game summaries, photos, and stats for all major sports, including baseball, football, basketball, hockey, golf, tennis, auto racing, NCAA Division

I, and selected minorleague sports. (No word on whether Zone covers Australian rules football.) Also on tap are interactive player files, a variety of online chat



areas, and a litany of services from ESPN, the Associated Press, STATS Inc., Sports Ticker, Knight-Ridder/Tribune Media Service, and All-Sport Photographic. — Marc Horowitz 🛎



#### 0000 two-step

The Cyclopean logo of the Sound Retrieval System, which adorns some high-end Sony and RCA televisions plus a handful of speakers and computer add-ons, now appears on Packard Bell multimedia PCs. Packard Bell, who says that their nameplate can be found on nearly half of all home computers sold through mass-market retailers, has become the first computer maker to build SRS's 3-D sound technology into all of its models. The electronic enhancement, which is de-

signed to deliver the sonic width, depth, and ambience of a surround-sound system from only two speakers, restores spatial cues that are normally lost in the recording process and is compatible with any type of audio signal.

What if you already own an MPC and feel the urge to upgrade? Media Vision, Labtec, and Jazz are among the companies providing SRS-equipped sound cards and speakers. And NMB Technologies sells a keyboard that incorporates two speakers as well as SRS circuitry.

—Rob Sabin



Packard Bell's SRS-equipped P75

#### 0000 high flying

Neil Young doesn't like the sound quality of CDs. Most people think they sound terrific, of course, but Young has turned to the new High Definition Compatible Digital (HD-CD) process for his long-awaited (but currently unscheduled) retrospective box set. Audiophiles also swear that HDCDs sound better than conventional CDs.

The HDCD process, which was invented by Pacific Microsonics, employs a higher sampling rate and a longer bit "word" than standard CDs; in short, HDCDs hold much more information than standard CDs. The circuitry required to decode this information

can be included in a standalone "black box," an outboard D/A converter, or an otherwise conventional CD player. Though its effect is most noticeable with HDCD-encoded discs, HDCD decoding is also said to subtly improve the sound quality of standard CDs.

Pacific Microsonics plans to ship HDCD encoders to record labels this month. Currently, the only HDCDs you can buy are 12 classical and jazz titles from Reference Recordings. Adcom, Audio Alchemy, Mark Levinson, and 22 other hardware manufacturers are licensed to build HDCD decoders into their gear; prices currently range from around \$600 to "don't ask." - Tom Miller

#### 0000 game advance

The XBand Video Game Network, from Catapult Entertainment, takes gam-



ing to the next level by allowing two gamers in two different locations—in different households, towns, or states—to compete head-to-head in real-time over standard phone lines.

Currently, the Network is available only to Sega Genesis and/or Super Nintendo owners who live in Atlanta, Dallas, Los Angeles, New York, or San Francisco. Gamers have to

buy an XBand modem and software (\$30); the modem slides into the console's cartridge slot, games into the modem. Since joystickcontrol data, not game data, is transmitted, both gamers must also have the same game hardware and software. The service has a monthly subscription fee (\$7.95) and a per-use connection fee (\$0.25); new subscribers get 32 connection "credits" free, and the package includes email service via the Internet.

Catapult expects to expand the Network nationally this summer and to provide it via a networked online service to Pentiumequipped PC gamers; PCs equipped with a modem won't require the \$30 XBand add-on. Currently, only two players can compete head-to-head, but Catapult expects to add multiplayer capability in the future. —James K. Willcox



Audio Alchemy's HDCD-ready DDE V3.0

#### Surround sound fit for a rear-projection set

## THE BIG SHOW



ARRY AND CANDY BRONSTEIN take their movies seriously. They bought a big-screen TV back when 20-inchers were the norm, and their ever-expanding storage units house over 100 videotapes. As the resident electronics buff, Barry is ready to upgrade the family's system, and he's already picked out a new 45inch rear-projector, a laserdisc player, and a Hi-Fi VCR. In other words. the Bronsteins (shown here with Chris, left, and Tracy) have the video half of their home-theater system wrapped up.

Now they need to capitalize on the impact delivered by their favorite movies' soundtracks. So they're looking into Dolby Pro Logic, and they've set aside \$5,000 for surround-sound electronics and speakers. Unfortunately, they're a little confused. Like most folks, they're uncomfortable with the fast-talking salespeople they've met in the superstores. Some pushed an A/V receiver, while others tried to sell them

on separates. And the couple are also wondering about a THX-certified system.

Looking for guidance, the Bronsteins turned to VIDEO. As always, we advised them to seek out a knowledgeable salesperson at a specialty A/V shop—someone who really knows home-theater options and is willing to take the time to lay them all out. Then we went a step further, asking three specialists what they would recommend if the couple walked into their shop. Though their opinions differ, our specialists' recommendations provide a foundation for building a personalized system. Prices quoted are real-world, before tax or installation help.

#### **Bob Cole Bob & Ron's World Wide Stereo** Montgomeryville, PA

IF THE BRONSTEINS WANT TO USE ONE system for music and home theater, I'd steer away from THX-it's a wonderful system, but you typically end up with a sonic stage that's set up just for watching movies. Also, THX products all perform within set specifications, and not everyone likes their music that way; this is especially true of THX speakers. At this budget, it's hard to get a THX system that sounds as great with music as it does with movies.

I think going with an A/V receiver is best for ease of use: Barry may be a techie, but Candy and the kids probably need something simpler. The Denon receiver and Paradigm speakers I'm recommending deliver audiophile-caliber music and spectacular movie sound; the "bipolar" main speakers create a huge image. And two powered subs will deliver really tight, clean bass; the Bronsteins will even get deep bass when the volume knob is low, which is good in a family environment. I'm also recommending a Denon outboard D/A converter for the digital output on the couple's laserdisc player—it really improves clarity and imaging with movies.

#### Dak Cala's Quetam: Q4 OFR

DOU DOIG 3 BYSTEM.	07,000
(i) Denon AVR-2500 A/V receiver	\$1,000
(1) Denon DA-500 D/A converter	\$500
(2) Paradigm Esprit main speakers	\$1,200
(1) Paradigm CC 300 center speaker	\$300
(2) Paradigm APD 150 surround speakers	<u>\$400</u>
(2) Paradigm PS 1000 powered subwoofers	\$1,000
Audioquest cabling	\$450

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B&W's HTM center speaker

#### Jim Bark's System: \$4,900

- (1) Onkyo TX-SV919THX \$1,800 THX receiver
- (1) Parasound HCA-1000 \$500 THX amplifier
- (1) JBL HT speaker package \$2,600
  - (3) HTIF main/center speakers
  - (2) HTID surround speakers
  - (2) HTIS passive subwoofers

#### Jim Bark HiTech Homes, Cedarburg, WI

The whole idea with home theater is to excite the senses, and THX is a big benefit here. The electronics optimize the system's tonal balance for movies, and with THX speakers you get controlled dispersion for a more horizontal, or spread-out, image. Considering the Bronsteins' budget, a THX A/V receiver is the way to go—they'd have to double their budget, at least, to get into it with separates. Value-wise, the

Onkyo pretty much stands alone: It's got great amplifiers that play loudly and provide good transient response, and it uses Motorola's new digital processing chip. The Onkyo is also the only THX receiver available that'll allow the couple to upgrade to AC-3 [the next generation of surround-sound processing].

JBL's HT speaker package is one of the best-sounding and lowest-priced THX-certified systems around. The speakers are highly efficient, for robust output with modest power, and their compact size and magnetically shielded cabinets make placement easy. The dipole surrounds produce a good ambient soundfield, and the two 12-inch passive subwoofers—when driven by Parasound's THX amp—will devastate most powered subwoofers.

#### **Murray Selarz** Sound Factor, Santa Monica, CA

THIS BUDGET LETS YOU BUILD AN ENTRY-level THX system around a good THX receiver, which may be the way to go if all the Bronsteins want to do is watch movies. But if they're also interested in using this system to listen to music, they'd need a much larger budget in order to go

with a complete THX system.

If I were buying a \$5,000 system, I wouldn't build it around a receiver; I'd go with medium-priced separates. This way, the amp has its own power supply and chassis and doesn't contribute noise or heat to

#### Murray Selarz's System: \$5.245

- (1) Carver CT-27 \$749 preamp/processor/tuner
- (1) Carver AV-405 amplifier \$699
- (2) B&W Model 804 \$1,900 main speakers
- (1) B&W HTM center speaker \$699
- (2) Atlantic Technology Model 254 surround speakers \$249
- (1) Velodyne Model 1200X \$949 powered subwoofer

the preamp or surround processor.

I'd go with a Carver preamp/tuner/ surround processor and multichannel amp, which are outstanding performers in the audio domain. and B&W speakers up front, so the Bronsteins will get all-around phenomenal sound. B&W's Model 804 main speakers are from the Matrix line, which has special internal bracing and a top-mounted tweeter that improves imaging; the HTM is the matching center-channel speaker. The servo-controlled bass from the Velodyne powered subwoofer will be tighter and less thumpy than the bass from a reqular subwoofer. And Atlantic Technology's Model 254 surround speakers will do an excellent job out back.





JBL's HTIF THX speaker, Denon's AVR-2500 receiver

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# GLASS AGI

CUTTING-EDGE DIRECT-VIEW TECHNOLOGY

PAINTING AND ENHANCING DELIVERING A GREAT performance to everyone in the room. Focusing Adding depth and dimension. Using special combs and masks Modulating always modulating We could be talking about an opera diva's swansong of a masterwork by a renowned painter, but we're not—we be accounted.

tually referring to the goals that TV manufacturers pursue in their quest to deliver great performances of their own. While singers toil on stage and pantiers use a canvas, TV makers work in glass though at least one company plans to diversity from the medium in the not-too distant future. Welcome to direct view TV



BY MARJORIE COSTELLO

PHOTO BY TONY CORDOZ

technology, circa the last half of the last decade of the millennium.

Glass cathode-ray tubes (CRTs) provide the core TV-screen technology for direct-view TV sets. Larger tubesthose above 27 inches-make up more of each manufacturer's direct-view lineup with each year's product introductions. Dark-tint tubes, which allow for high-contrast pictures with more depth and color, are ubiquitous in these big-screen sets. And many sets have Invar Shadow Mask tubes. These tubes use a mask that's made of a metal alloy, which is more resistant to thermal expansion than traditional iron masks. Containing heat is critical, since it can warp a mask, making it more difficult for a set's electron beam to consistently excite the correct phosphors (if adjacent phosphors are excited, image areas that are supposed to appear bright white will be tinged a yellowish

TV tubes are also getting flatter (officially known as "reduced curvature"). Though they aren't completely flat, so-called flat screens minimize room reflections, providing more of a movietheater experience, the ideal as the home-theater revolution continues to rage. Flat tubes also offer good viewing from greater angles off center, enabling even those who don't have the best seat in the room to enjoy a truly high-quality image.

part of the high-definition TV, or HDTV, spec), most of today's directview sets still use a 4:3 ratio. Only one TV maker, in fact, plans to introduce widescreen sets this season.

Tubes aren't the only facet that are

Tubes aren't the only facet that are getting a face-lift, though. TV makers are upgrading their sets' chassis, adding all types of new circuitry as well as more current for driving the electron beam that creates pictures. Many models now include circuitry that automatically monitors the picture, adjusting colors, increasing black-level (brightness), and varying the scanning speed (or velocity) of the electron beam to emphasize differences in brightness, making edges sharper.

Virtually every manufacturer plants a comb filter in their sets—some use a plain-vanilla glass filter, while others upgrade to digital filters that are claimed to do a better job of separating the chroma (color) portion of the signal from luminance (black-and-white), for purer pictures. At the same time, many TV makers have also exiled notch filters, the comb filter's precursor. In their place, they're matching digital combs to special circuitry; the package delivers the same color and sharpness benefits of a notch without the resolution loss it's known to cause.

Many videophiles are loudly demanding that the images produced by their TVs accurately reflect what direc-

tors and cinematographers intended when they were making their films. And many TV makers and cinematographers are responding, by adding color-temperature controls that, in a growing number of sets, achieve or closely approximate the NTSC broadcast standard of 6,500 degrees Kelvin.

Cable and, especially, satellite services offer dozens or even hundreds of programming options, which is a TV watcher's dream. But keeping track of all of your options can be tough. In response, TV makers are incorporating on-screen guides that enable viewers to identify programs and navigate among them. Several TV makers are building circuitry for the StarSight programguide service into their sets; once a viewer subscribes to StarSight's service, the set decodes the company's comprehensive on-screen guide. Most TV makers, however, are either focusing their StarSight efforts on their VCR lines or are waiting to see how consumers accept the guide.

Some TV makers express hope that XDS (for "extended data services," and formerly known as EDS) takes off, since it's free to consumers-and relatively inexpensive to add via the closed-captioning circuitry required in TVs by law since 1993. A few companies are doing more than hoping, adding XDS to their new direct-view models. But XDS seems inadequate to the task: Though, like StarSight, it's transmitted on the vertical blanking interval (VBI), XDS is a bare-bones onscreen identification system that delivers far less information than StarSight does. Currently, only PBS stations are willing to provide simple XDS-format time, date, and (in some cases) program-name information-and then only for their own channel.

Most TV makers seemed to be jazzed by GuidePlus+, the on-screen guide that's being developed by Gemstar, the



company that brought us the VCR Plus+ time-shifting feature and the recent Index Plus+ system (which enables easy access to a specific program on a videotape that has been recorded with multiple programs). GuidePlus+, which is reportedly more detailed than XDS but not as comprehensive as Star-Sight, has no subscription fee; it'll probably add more to the cost of a TV set than XDS capability does, however, since Gemstar will have to foot the bill for transmitting GuidePlus+ information over the VBI. Many TV companies are considering adding GuidePlus+ to their sets next year, when it's scheduled to be ready for primetime.

TVs are set to change in even more substantial ways, of course. Before the end of the decade, we're very likely to see sets that are, if not true computers, at least capable of decoding and displaying digital MPEG-2-encoded images. The impressive success of the alldigital DSS (Digital Satellite System) is just the beginning of television's bold new digital future. New formats we're likely to see next year-such as D-VHS VCRs (which use conventional S-VHS tape to record digital bitstreams) and DVD players (which use CD-size discs to hold MPEG-2 digital video as well as digital audio)-are also giving TV makers plenty to think about.

HDTV's fortunes appear bright this season thanks to announcements by the NBC television network, Thomson (parent company of RCA, ProScan, and GE), and Zenith. NBC said it will broadcast HDTV signals in 1997, and both Thomson and Zenith expect to have HDTV sets ready for sale in the same time frame. Meanwhile, the FCC is slated to give its final blessing on HDTV's technical parameters as well as on other digital delivery systems by the end of this year. As you'll see, this year's direct-view lineup is more evolutionary than HDTV-caliber revolutionary, but that doesn't make it any less exciting.

#### **GOLDSTAR**

"Big screen" at GoldStar means 27 inches, and all of the company's models incorporate comb filters and blackmatrix picture tubes. For added convenience, A/V jacks are provided on one side of the set's cabinet, facilitating hookup of camcorders and videogame consoles without detracting from the set's appearance.



Later this year or early in 1996, GoldStar will debut its GCT-2796 (\$899). This new "flat"-screen 27-incher will feature an Invar Shadow Mask tube and velocity-modulation scanning. A CCD comb filter will join the pictureenhancement package. Also in the works for early 1996 is at least one set with a built-in StarSight decoder.

#### HITACHI

The TV makers at Hitachi are very busy. The company is selling two new "flat"-tube models-the 35UX80B (\$1,999) and 35UX70B (\$1,799)—that also feature an Invar Shadow Mask. All of the company's big-screen directview TVs incorporate a dark-tint tube, known as Ultra-Black. And all Hitachi big-screen models include comb filtering, with the top-of-the line 35UX80B and the 32UX8B 32-incher (\$1,099) offering digital comb filtering.

Thanks to a revision in their electron guns, Hitachi is offering a dynamic-focus tube in their 31- and 32-inch models, with the latter being a new screen size for the company. The new tube produces a smaller beam spot at edges and corners, and this is said to result in especially sharper pictures with reduced "blooming."

Some Hitachi models can be set for "cool" or "warm" pictures, which are tied to their color temperatures. Neither option dials in the broadcast-standard 6.500 degrees Kelvin, however, "As a signal is converted, broadcast, and received," says Bruce Schoenegge, Hitachi's director of product management, "it gets attacked by a variety of influences. On a set with a 6,500-degree picture, the end result would look far too red to almost any set of eyes."

Hitachi is incorporating artificial-intelligence circuits into their most expensive sets. The circuits use a form of fuzzy logic to measure the amount of noise inherent in a signal and automatically make corrections as needed. These same pricey sets also use velocity-scan modulation.

Looking ahead, Hitachi is working with Thomson to develop D-VHS products. Hitachi executives believe that they'll be able to offer cost-effective combination TV/D-VHS units only after they move along the learning curve with standalone D-VHS VCRs. Hitachi also expects to build MPEG-2 decoders into TVs—as long as the compression scheme becomes a standard or is mandated.

#### JVC

The top model in each of JVC's direct-view screen sizes is a Premiere set, and these models receive the company's best circuitry and performance



Samsung TCB2735, GoldStar 27546

features. Each Premiere set has an Invar Shadow Mask, and the Premiere 31- and 27-inch sets also feature "flat" tubes. JVC's largest direct-view, the 35-inch AV-35BH6 (\$1,899), doesn't have a flat tube, but it does incorporate a dark-tint tube. (Toshiba and Mitsubishi, the only sources for "flat" 35-inch tubes, aren't making them available to other companies at this time.) Tinting carries through to all of JVC's direct-view sets, in fact, which also feature a new chassis that's said to boost video performance.

Comb and notch filters are paired in all JVC direct-views. The Premiere sets tap a special wideband comb (as opposed to a basic glass unit) that processes a wider part of the signal, said to deliver better color separation. (Digital comb filtering is currently restricted to JVC's Premiere rear-projection TVs.) The company's sets also include the THEATER STATUS/AV setting, which approximates the 6,500-degree color-temperature standard.

Premiere models also employ black-level-expansion circuitry, for blacker blacks, and video noise reduction, for reducing "sparkles" and "snow" from rented videos and in weak reception areas. Velocity modulation is on hand to sharpen the edges in graphics and alphanumerics.

Though JVC developed the D-VHS

standard and plans to sell digital bitstream recorders in 1996, David Kline, the company's sales engineering manager, can't say if JVC will ever build D-VHS VCRs into their TV sets.

As for MPEG-2 decoding becoming part of JVC's TV package, Kline is skeptical. "Software changes too rapidly," he says. "If you build one of these black boxes into a TV, who's to say that it's going to be the winning format... that it'll be around in 12 to 15 years when the TV it's built into is still alive and kicking?"

#### **MAGNAVOX**

One of the grand old names in TV design, Magnavox will continue to take a populist approach to TV building in 1995 and beyond. Though the company invented Invar masking and features it in all of their 32-inch models, Magnavox executives say that they're not big believers in the technology. In fact, their engineers are working on software implementations of standard picture adjustments that they say will outperform Invar.

Because their research indicates that consumers like images with sharp contrast and Coke-can reds, Magnavox is offering dark-glass tubes as well as comb filters (another Magnavox invention) on nearly every set in their line. Special circuitry that "stretches" blacks and boosts reds is also available in some models, delivering even higher contrast and brighter reds.

No manual color-temperature adjustments are featured on Magnavox TVs,

which are set at 8,200 degrees Kelvin. Mark Stephenson, the company's vice president for color TV, says that pictures with a 6,500-degree color temperature don't appeal to most consumers. As an alternative, all Magnavox sets have a feature called Smart Picture, which offers four preset combinations of color, tint, brightness, picture, and sharpness settings.

Thanks to parent company Philips, Magnavox has taken the lead in eliminating picture "ghosts." Philips' ghost-cancellation reference (GCR) signal is the industry standard, and it's currently broadcast by nearly half of the TV stations in the United States. The GCR signal-processing circuitry will be incorporated in the 27-inch TP2798C1A and 32-inch TP3298C1 (prices not available at presstime), which, along with a standalone GCR box, will be available later this year.

Magnavox incorporates a "flat" tube in some of their 27- and 32-inch models, including the TP3272C (\$899), their top table model. Though the company offered a 34-inch 16:9 model in the past, it's now discontinued. On the other hand, Magnavox Plus, a new high-end TV line, is due later this year.

On the special-effects front, a new instant-replay feature stores the last 8 seconds of programming for slow-motion or stop-action playback in real-time; it's offered in select 32- and 27-inch sets. Magnavox is one of the companies that's looking very closely at GuidePlus+; though they've built a StarSight decoder into some of their

VCRs and into a standalone box, they don't currently offer a StarSightequipped TV.

Magnavox is developing products that combine TV and PC functions as well as use compression technology. The company's engineers are also working on "smart cards": They'll plug into a slot in the TV in the same way that computer cards are plugged into PCs, and they'll enable owners to upgrade their sets, adding capabilities such as ghost cancellation, StarSight, modem functions, and more.

#### **MITSUBISHI**

The inventor of the 35-inch picture tube is celebrating the tube's 10th Anniversary this year, and Mitsubishi is also expanding on its bigger sibling, the 40-inch tube (another Mits invention). Invar will be available on more 35-inch models and in all three of the company's new 40-inchers. (Mitsubishi remains the only company to offer this jumbo direct-view screen size for home use.) A flatter CRT is also featured in several 35-inch models, including the upcoming flagship CS-35805 (\$3,199). These and other Mitsubishi big-screen sets include dark-tint tubes.

the upcoming 40-inch CS-40805 (\$3,999) incorporate an enhanced 3-D comb filter dubbed the 3D Y/C. Digital filtering is accomplished via a 2-D filter in the other 40-inchers and several 35inch sets, with the balance of Mits' sets using a basic glass comb filter.

Mits sets offer a HIGH/MID/LOW color adjustment, but none of the settings takes you all the way down to 6,500 degrees Kelvin. The company's current position—which it shows indications of changing—is that a 6,500-degree setting produces pictures that are too warm and that look good only in dark rooms.

As the second company to offer Star-Sight in a TV, Mitsubishi is making the guide easier to read on one 40-inch and

three 35-inch sets through bit-mapped graphics. All Mits direct-views offer XDS, which the company debuted in 1993.

Mitsubishi's big

play technology for a flat-panel configuration, the company has selected plasma, which will be featured in at least one 40-inch model that's slated to go on sale late in 1996. Mits claims that they've overcome the brightness and contrast problems of plasma technology and are now tackling heat-dissipation. Jack Osborn, the company's president, predicts that the set "will exceed current [NTSC-level] performance and offer no distortion from [any] viewing angle." Though Mits is a year away from fixing a price for this set, Osborn did say that it shouldn't cost much more than the company's priciest rearprojection models—that puts it in the ballpark of \$5,000—within ■ few years of its launch.



#### SNEAK PREVIEW

TV MAKERS ARE USUALLY VERY SECREtive about previewing new designs or
models, so we were surprised when
Thomson showed prototypes of a variety of next-generation TV sets at a
recent press conference. In addition
to sets incorporating DSS receiver,
a D-VHS VCR, or a single-disc DVD
player, Thomson also unveiled a set
that incorporates a 65-disc DVD
changer (right); the discs are visible
behind the vertical panel centered
beneath the set's tube.



#### **PANASONIC**

The big-screen direct-view lineup from Panasonic is split into three groups: the premium SuperFlat XF, SuperFlat, and the mainstream Pana-Black. Sets in the first two groups all use "flat" screens. All of the company's sets use dark-tint tubes, which Panasonic began using in 1991. SuperFlat sets also employ an Invar Shadow Mask. In addition, select sets are said to benefit from special phosphors, for improved reds and greens.

All of the company's big-screen direct-views feature notch filters and at least a glass-type comb filter. Digital comb filtering is featured in the top SuperFlat models, including the 31-inch CT-31XF40 (\$1,699). This model, along with other SuperFlat sets that feature dual-tuner PIP, incorporate Panasonic's AI Picture functions. This artificial intelligence circuitry monitors the image, making contrast adjustments automatically—reportedly, without affecting the rest of the picture.

High-end SuperFlat models, along with 35-inch PanaBlacks, feature a three-position color-temperature switch; one position dials in a 7,200-degree picture. According to Jerry Surprise, national product manager for Matsushita (Panasonic's parent), the company hasn't gone all the way down to 6,500 degrees because "We don't think it looks that good. White looks too pink at 6,500."

While Panasonic isn't currently selling widescreen direct-view sets here, Robert DeYoung, Matsushita's assis-

16:9

Sharp Model 34W1000

tant general manager of marketing, says they're coming: "Our next goal is 16:9. There's a consumer benefit—it's more comfortable for viewing, and you see more of the picture as the director intended it—so we'll develop it."

"Galileo" is another forward-looking product. Previewed this spring, Galileo combines a relatively large TV monitor, which is capable of displaying a wide range of video and computer graphics, and a CD-ROM player; it's operated by a mouse-like wireless keypad. Panasonic executives say that a DVD player could replace the CD-ROM player in future Galileos.

#### **PROTON**

A chassis with a tightly regulated power supply is the premier performance feature in Proton's direct-view models. For Proton, it's the foundation upon which contrast-related features—aimed at delivering truly accurate and lifelike images—can be built. Chief among these concerns is the goal of producing pure black; Proton's engineers say a TV can't reproduce images that have real depth and dimension without it.

To maintain pure black, Proton says that their sets use advanced DC-restoration circuitry. This circuitry works with their sets' power supply, and Proton claims that the package is 95 percent effective in resetting the red, blue, and green phosphors to zero, thereby achieving pure black. Proton sets also compensate for shifts in black-level as an image's brightness decreases. As a result, the full contrast range can be maintained.

Proton says they take this purist approach to picture performance because their customers are not the general buying public. As evidence, the company notes that 65 percent of Proton owners also own laserdisc players.

The company had been using datagrade tubes in all of their sets, but these tubes are no longer available, so Proton is making the transition to new tubes that incorporate the Invar Shadow Mask. Sets with these new tubes are due in stores soon. Filtering is accomplished with both comb and notch filters. Proton's new 35-inch models, including the NT-3740 (\$3,000; see "VideoTests," page 37), use a digital comb filter, which will be making an eventual migration into the company's other sets as well.

Proton has a unique approach to providing customers with images that meet the 6,500-degree color-temperature standard: Customers can order it as an option from a Proton dealer. Proton's engineers can make the necessary adjustments themselves, or they can be made by a technician from the Imaging Science Foundation (ISF). [See "Home Theater," April 1995, for more on the ISF.]

This different-drummer stance may also explain the fact that Proton is the CONTINUED ON PAGE 79



#### FOR THE DISCRIMINATING MOVIE FAN.



#### **CLUB FAVORITES**

	The Client	*1300409
ı	Philadelphia	*1251404
	Bladerunner: The Director's Cut	*1097906
	Terminator 2: Judgment Day	*0233205
	Cliffhanger	*1149301
l	Demolition Man	*1199306
i	Unforgiven (1992)	*1084003
	Maverick	*1297209
	The Fugitive	*1197706
	Close Encounters of the Third Kind	
	(Special Edition)	*1273002
	Natural Born Killers	*1327709
	Wolf	*1314905
	Total Recall	*1286103

Aliens	0360909
Alien	0000208
Alien 3	*1042506
The Exorcist	0600304
Monty Python And The	*0192005
Holy Grail	
The Paper	*1285501
Rambo: First Blood	*0650309
The Sound Of Music	*0003905
Unforgiven (1992)	*1084003
Hard Target	*1179605
Dragon: The	
Bruce Lee Story	*1150705
The Wizard Of Oz	0001404
The Firm	*1154400
Ghost	*0826008
Carlito's Way	*1229301
A Few Good Men	*1106301
The Abyss	*0881102



Predator

Predator 2

Robin Hood:

The Silence Of The Lambs

Indecent Proposal

Prince Of Thieves

**Back To The Future** 

**Back To The Future** 

Scent Of A Woman

Conan The Barbarian

My Cousin Vinny

Home Alone 2:

**Patriot Games** 

The Last Of The

Mohicans (1992)

Backdraft

Lost In New York

Batman (1989) **Batman Returns** 

Goodfellas **Back To The Future** 

Part III







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In The Line Of Fire	*1190107
The Bodyguard	*1105907
Basic Instinct	*1033208
On Deadly Ground	*1251909
Star Trek:	
The Motion Picture	*0203505
Star Trek II:	
The Wrath Of Khan	*0201301
Star Trek III:	
The Search For Spo	rock *0201608
Star Trek IV:	
The Voyage Home	*0430603
Star Trek VI: The	
Undiscovered Cou	ntry *1001007
Hook	*0854307
Mad Max - The Roa	ıd
Warrior	*1261106
Highlander	0382309

The Hunt For Red October

Die Hard 2: Die Harder

Bram Stoker's Dracula

Die Hard

* Letterbox	
Beverly Hills Cop 3	*1300201
Sleepless in Seattle	*1154905
Citizen Kane (Remastered/ 50th Anniversary)	0911107
Age Of Innocence	*1207307
Jaws	*0844605
Under Siege	*1077908
The Prince Of Tides	*0847103
Guarding Tess	*1299700
48 Hours (Remastered)	*1315308
Rising Sun	*1174804
The Last Action Hero	*1154806
The Flintstones	*1297308
Chinatown	*0202507
Grumpy Old Men	*1251503
2001: A Space Odyssey	*0844308
The Naked Gun 33 1/3 – The Final Insult	*1286707

#### **NEW RELEASES**

1330001
*1297001
*1356005
*1356302
*1356401
*1353705
esert nination: *1345206
*1338409
1337005
*1336304
*1332204
*1332006

In the Name Of The	
Father	*1247709
The Running Man	*1316108
Witness (Remastered)	*1315407
Silverado	*0181008
Time Bandits (Remastered)	*1330109
Bridge On The River	
Kwai (Restored)	*1143809
The Piano	*1237809
Outland	*1328103
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Of Curly's Gold	*1296805

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#### **THX pursues** laserdisc excellence



PPEARANCES, AS EVERYONE knows, can be deceiving. You can tell a sports coupe by its sexy lines, womb-like interior, and price tag, but it isn't a good sports coupe unless it accelerates like a rocket and handles like a dream. Likewise, a business suit may look sharp, but you'll only get a measure of its quality after you feel its material (and get it back after its first dry-cleaning). The same goes for laserdiscs. Simply transferring a movie to a 12-inch polycarbonate sandwich doesn't automatically guarantee that it'll live up to the format's potential. Plenty of things can affect a disc's bottom-line quality, including the quality of the source and the various technical aspects of the actual transfer. In an attempt to provide home-theater owners with topquality programming, THX, the guideline-forming arm of Lucasfilm Ltd., has been certifying laserdiscs for the past 2 years. Though THX took a lot of heat recently for a high-profile blunder with

the widescreen version of Stargate [see "Slipped Disc," page 27], their track record has been encouraging and videophiles as well as movie enthusiasts certainly commend THX for their efforts.

THX certifies only those discs that exhibit the qualities Lucasfilm deems essential to create the ideal home-theater experience. All aspects of the film transfer are monitored by THX personnel, and the filmmakers themselves are actively involved in the process. First, a director is encouraged to bring the best source material to the party. Then the transfer is made. Next, the director is asked to evaluate its accuracy in terms of color, contrast, and detail; this task is aided by a calibrated professional-quality monitor and a spectrophotometer (an instrument that precisely measures color output), both of which are provided by THX personnel.

The soundtrack is then meticulously matched to the film image from the original film masters. All soundtrack aspects are optimized: level, the balance among the dialogue, score, and sound effects, and the distribution of elements among the surround-sound channels.

In the last step, THX personnel insert the company's patented Vertical Interval Test Signal (VITS) into unutilized spaces between a disc's fields. (All NTSC video formats have these spaces; usually, they remain unused.) The VITS is a digital calibrated reference signal that enables THX personnel to make a direct, verifiable comparison between the master and any copy; comparisons can be made at any or all stages of the manufacturing process.

The reference signal doesn't need to be decoded in any way by your LD player (in fact, it can only be accessed by specialized equipment); it exists only as a means of establishing the accuracy of the manufacturing process. As Dave Schnuelle, principal engineer of THX's disc program, explains it: "We're the only ones who put a test signal into the

master and then say to the manufacturing facility, 'You have to reproduce this perfectly. This is what we expect the final product to look like."

Schnuelle adds that disc-manufacturing plants are capable of producing high-quality discs across the board; not all laserphiles seem to feel this way, favoring some plants over others. All parties seem to agree, however, that current LD players don't get in the way of the stunning images and sound captured on a high-quality disc.

"The performance characteristics of a good LD player are virtually identical to those of a 1-inch Type C broadcast video recorder," Schnuelle points out, "which we used until 1987 to master movies. For a consumer product costing under \$1,000 to deliver the quality that only \$80,000 professional gear could offer 8 years ago . . . that's fairly

Since the inception of the program in 1993. THX has certified 34 video transfers, with over one-third of them being pricey collector's editions of film classics and blockbuster spectaculars. Recent releases have focused on mainstream titles and have been given reasonable price tags-the THX Speed costs less than \$30, their True Lies and Timecop less than \$40. By the end of this year, more than 75 titles should be available.

I recently spent some quality time comparing THX discs with earlier editions of the same films, as well as critically evaluating recent films mastered to THX's standards, and I'm convinced that THX knows what they're doing. While some THX discs were only marginally superior to otherwise identical non-THX versions, there was no circumstance in which I preferred a non-THX disc to a THX disc. And for the most part, the differences I discerned weren't subtle-fascinating, amusing, and instructive, yes, but never subtle.

One of the first comparisons I made was between the THX director's cut of Terminator 2: Judgment Day and LIVE's existing widescreen version. From the opening frame, the THX disc was visually superior: It offered clearer images with richer colors. Dialogue was easier to understand, even during the many sequences that were accompanied by loud sound effects. The score had more impact and was more successfully integrated into the film, particularly during the famous "Canal Chase" sequence. Visual contrasts

#### SLIPPED DISC

LASERPHILES, AND MANY MEMBERS OF THE AUDIO/VIDEO COMMUNITY AT LARGE. were stunned recently when THX announced a recall of its entire initial run of Pioneer LDC's widescreen Stargate. The reason: The left Dolby Surround audio channel in the entire batch was marred by a phase inversion, causing soundtrack elements to jump haphazardly among a home-theater system's speakers when the Dolby Pro Logic or THX mode was selected.

In an official statement, THX's Paul Matwiy explained, "The left-channel phase inversion on the THX release of Stargate (widescreen version only) was discovered during the distribution of the disc. After investigating the procedures involved during the complex matrix and AC-3 audio transfers, it was determined that both Pioneer and THX were mutually responsible for the error. . . . The important thing is to learn from and act decisively on [such] mistakes." Matwiy assured purchasers that defective discs would be replaced by retailers and that all

future THX discs would benefit from even more stringent quality control.

"It was just human error," Pioneer LDC's Laurie Anderson elaborates. "We instructed retailers to replace [the defective discs] immediately. The regular and Dolby AC-3 soundtracks were fine; only the Dolby Surround track was affected." When asked if the incident had diminished Pioneer's enthusiasm for THX certification, Anderson responded, "Absolutely not."

Welcome as stricter quality-control measures will be, the whole purpose of THX certification is to prevent this kind of error. Dave Schnuelle, principal engineer for THX's LD program,



Phase problems prompted a recall

agrees: "I don't think anyone would argue that point, but nothing can be absolutely perfect, and this is just one that got through.'

But an entire batch? "It's complicated, pretty damn complicated, actually," Schnuelle says. "In over 20 years of transferring feature films, I've never seen anything like it. . . . It wasn't a simple phase reversal—that's happened before. This was far more complex. With a phase reversal, all of the dialogue comes from the side channels and none from the front. This time, the dialogue came from all of the channels.

"Stargate was one of the first AC-3 projects, and we didn't know all of the failure modes—normally, you establish quality-control procedures based on what you know can go wrong. This was totally new, and until we had some experience with real discs, it was difficult to determine everything to check for.'

The Stargate recall isn't the first mixup THX has experienced, however. Laserphiles report that the THX-certified Beverly Hills Cop III shipped with the same program on both sides. "The two sides are manufactured at different times and are glued together later, so that can happen," Schnuelle acknowledges. "If it has, it was only in a few instances. We scan the Internet [to monitor consumer complaints] and stay in close contact with the studios. Anyone with a defective disc can just exchange it. That's never a problem."

Other laserphiles have complained that THX's Oklahoma! isn't as sharp as the pan-and-scan release, though direct comparisons are meaningless since the two versions are taken from different negatives. "I don't believe there's any comparison," Schnuelle scoffs. "Our transfer looks much sharper, and the colors are much more vibrant. Some transfers are super-enhanced to artificially sharpen the edges, and there's a certain subset of viewers who think that white edges around things make the picture look sharper. However, that introduces a lot more noise and there's less true detail.

"We get letters and phone calls about the most arcane things. We got a complaint about motion artifacts in a transfer once, and everything cited was deliberately added to the film by Industrial Light & Magic's patented Go-Motion process, which blurs fast-moving objects so that they don't strobe across the screen. We deal in a world where there are a lot of tradeoffs—we won't always please everybody.'

were more clearly delineated: The dark emotional subtext of the film was appropriately mirrored in the darkness of the sets (most of the last side takes place at night or in a dimly lit steel mill). With the non-THX disc, background details tended to get lost in the overall darkness; with the THX version, details were clearly visible.

In addition, THX's T2 features 15 minutes of footage cut from the theatrical release. Though some critics feel otherwise, I thought that these scenes added necessary texture and crucial motivation missing from the original. Simply put, THX's T2 is better than the already excellent LIVE T2. "We need to do something new and improved to justify the process when a quality video already exists," THX's Schnuelle says.

I'm dying to ask Schnuelle about the Star Wars Trilogy. These are the films that established the financial and artistic independence of George Lucas, the founder and guiding spirit of Lucasfilm Ltd; surely the existing widescreen collector's editions were carefully transferred to begin with. Weren't they?

"The Star Wars films had never been done properly," Schnuelle says. "George simply never had time to bother with it. At the time, even within Lucasfilm, there was no one with a proper grasp of how good laserdiscs could be."

A direct comparison again revealed that THX has the magic touch. Not that the older transfers were bad, but the THX editions were clearly superior—both audibly and visually. THX's *The Empire Strikes Back*, which, like *T2*, features a *noir*-ish palette, was far richer and more detailed than the earlier version, which seemed flat and bland in comparison. All three THX versions had deeper, more consistent colors. The soundtrack—effects, dialogue, and score—benefitted, too.

THX versions of older films fare just as well. *Oklahoma!* looked hugely improved. Perhaps the comparison isn't entirely fair, since two entirely different 65MM versions of the movie were shot; THX used the Todd-AO version, and the previous disc used the Cinema-Scope version. In any case, the THX version must be considered definitive: The Todd-AO scenes were shot first, and they're frequently more energetic and better lit. They also just plain work better, artistically.

And the *Oklahoma!* soundtrack is key—this show changed musical the-

"The THX logo means that there won't be a better version around."

ater forever, and the music reflects and elaborates upon the emotional subtext of the play. Improvements in clarity, detail, and the size and depth of the sonic image all have a profound dramatic impact. Here, the superiority of the THX disc can't be questioned: It just isn't close. Apparently, it's something of a miracle. "You don't know what we started with," Dave Schnuelle laughs. "It takes something special to get good results with some of the old ones."

Beverly Hills Cop, on the other hand, didn't serve up any dramatic improvements. Since the original LD is universally regarded as a dog, I thought that contrasting it with the THX version might prove instructive. Though the THX version is better, the disc still didn't look that great. But doesn't THX

certification mean that it will look great?

"The THX logo means that there won't be a better version around," Schnuelle clarifies. Are there situations, then, where THX will refuse to approve a film?

"Certainly," Schnuelle responds. "We've done that. We've started on projects, looked at them, and said, 'Here's your deposit back.'"

THX isn't resting on its laurels, of course. Even before the *Stargate* snafu surfaced and caused THX to take a long look at its quality-control process, the company was hard at work perfecting two new technologies—Dolby Surround AC-3, the digital 5.1-channel upgrade for Dolby Surround, and a set of digital-video manipulations. THX's newest releases, *True Lies* and *Clear and Present Danger*, benefit from both.

Though I didn't have access to an AC-3 home-theater system, I can say that the new video techniques seem to take laserdisc image quality to new heights (direct comparisons weren't possible, since the THX versions of these films are presently the only versions). In simple terms, THX scans the film at a high resolution and then converts it down to produce a high-quality NTSC image. Dave Schnuelle says that THX's method parallels those used to improve digital audio—oversampling, bitmapping, and interpolation—over the last 10 years.

"We recently played a D-1 master of Clear and Present Danger for Philip Noyce [the film's director]," Schnuelle says, "switching back and forth with our disc. Even he lost track of which was which."

Criterion, the laserphile's longtime champion, also sees some merit in THX's approach, having recently released a THX-certified *Silence of the Lambs*. (It's head-and-shoulders above the previous pan-and-scan version.) Peter Becker, Criterion's director, said the company always keeps an open mind about new technology and methods. He did note, however, "There were places in *Silence* that had more noise than we would have liked, though it fell within the [THX] spec."

In any case, THX's certification program is clearly on the right track. It's the closest thing that laserphiles have to an outright guarantee of quality. If you haven't at least sampled the company's way with the LDs, you can't really call yourself a videophile.

Sacrifice Nothing.

B&W's Matrix HTM Home Theater Speaker resolves the movies versus music debate once and for all. Corey Greenberg, Home Theater Technology

WHAT STARTED OUT AS A RAGING DEBATE HAS ENDED WITH RAVE REVIEWS.

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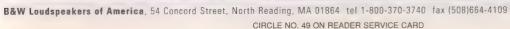
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# DIWICE Gonquer

#### Separate audio components take home theater to the next level BY ALEXANDER N. RETSOFF

CONVENIENCE IS A SEDUCTIVE MISTRESS, as the Pilgrims used to say. (Or was it executives from Ronco and Popeil's?) We Americans tend to worship at the altar of convenience: We invented fastfood restaurants, TV dinners, and 7-11. Remote controls were made for us. Anything that simplifies life is good. Our penchant for convenience is one of the main reasons why A/V and stereo receivers outsell "separate" audio components (preamplifiers, amplifiers, and surround-sound processors) by a huge margin. That's not true in most other countries

When we're not worshipping convenience, we go for value: We clip coupons. We proudly tell our neighbors about the rebates we've been awarded. We want the biggest bang for the buck. The feverish pursuit of value also leads many of us to choose receivers over separate components. One power supply, one chassis, fewer printed-circuit boards-it all adds up to considerable cost savings.

So why would anyone choose to shell out more dough for an ensemble of separate components that are arguably less convenient to use than a comparably equipped receiver? That question has been debated ever since receivers first intruded on separates territory. (Yes, separates came first.) Some people just like the looks of a stack of separate components-they're more impressive than a simple receiver, and who but the Joneses themselves doesn't like to one-up the Joneses?

Ask audiophiles, those fanatic fans of absolutely accurate music reproduction, why they gravitate towards separates-and they do, almost exclusively—and they'll tell you that it's not because of cosmetics, but because "separates sound better." While that's generally true, it really depends on what products are involved-I've tested some excellent separates, some pretty wimpy separates, and some damn-good receivers in my day.

It's definitely true that separates have a number of things going for them on the technical front. Since each has its own individual power supply and chassis, it's less likely that disparate circuits will negatively affect one another (in terms of electrical noise or heat buildup, for example). That in itself can help clean up a system's overall sound.

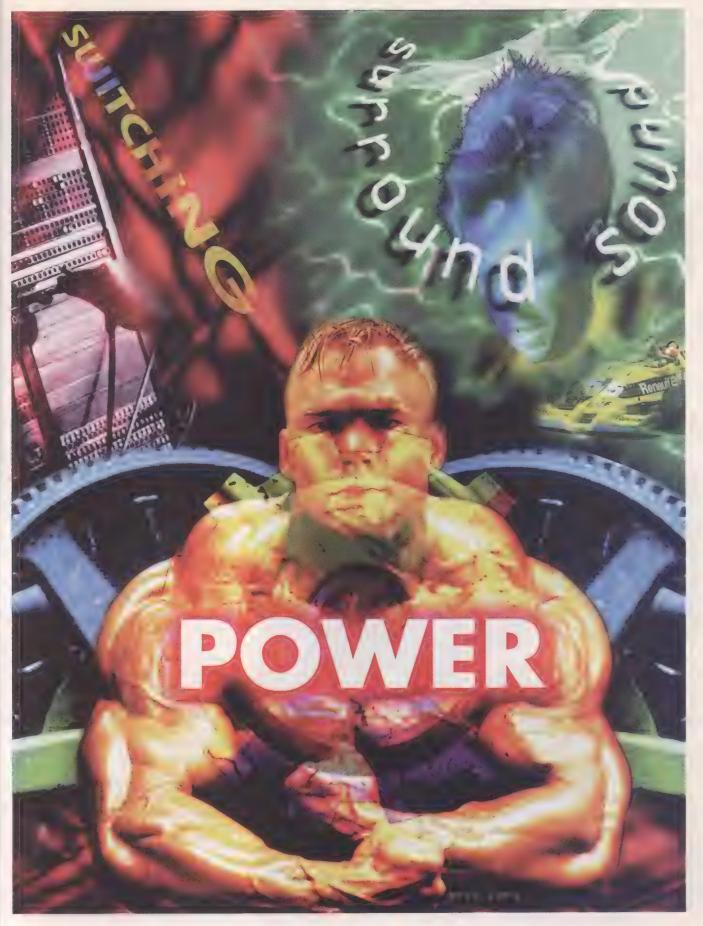
Furthermore, since separates cater to the high end of the market and receivers usually slug it out in the "wattsper-buck" trenches, you're likely to find better circuit design and better parts in separate components than in receivers. This isn't necessarily the case with the priciest receivers from big-name manufacturers, however.

Another advantage of taking the separates route is that it's relatively easy to improve a separates-based system as new innovations (and your budget) allow. Separates-based systems have a way of growing with you. When it comes to a receiver, it's all or nothing: When you want to make a change, you trash the whole thing (or, more likely, move it to another room or pass it along to a faithful and deserving soul) and

Finally, and possibly most importantly, the separates approach enables you to tailor a system that precisely meets your needs. You can choose specific components on the basis of what they do for you, rather than settling for what a receiver designer decided you needed. Simply put, separates-based systems are more "flexible" than receivers.

But flexibility comes at a price, and it's not denominated simply in dollars. Rather than making just one decision what receiver to buy-you must now choose each component individually and be sure that they all get along. Getting along in the electrical sense is not much of a problem; input and output levels and impedances are pretty well standardized among all types of components—by convention if not by international agreement. But that doesn't mean you can jerry-rig equipment and expect to end up with a sensible hometheater system that a mere mortal can operate.

Consider this example: You've fallen for the clean lines and heavy steel of a top-flight audio-only preamplifier and want to build a home-theater system 2 around it. Good luck! And you'll need it, because "straight" audio preamps aren't that easy to work with in a home-theater context. Sure, you could ! buy a Dolby Pro Logic surround-sound processor and connect it between the \frac{2}{5}



preamp and one or more separate power amplifiers, but, presuming that the Dolby processor has controls for selecting video sources (admittedly, that presumption could be unfounded), the preamp won't be used for A/V programs—so why would you need it in your home theater? This explains why even some of the purest purist audiophile manufacturers have begun to build A/V preamplifiers.

#### THE A/V CONTROLLER

And then the convenience factor again rears its head. The goal with any approach (separates or receiver) is to have a system that's *functional*. By "functional," I mean having the system do what you want it to do without your having to resort to anything more than a reasonably intuitive and consistent set of commands. There are two ways to look at this: On one hand, receivers

pack all of the controls for the system's preamp and surround functions in one chassis and on one remote control. It's all there; the only trick is that you have to be able to find it all, when you need to find it. If a designer had to cram buttons onto a receiver's front panel or keys onto its remote control, you may have a tough time. On the other hand, separate A/V preamps and surroundsound processors have a relatively spacious layout, and so will their remote controls. Finding controls should be easy, though there's two componentsand, probably, two remotes-with which to interact. Which route is better? Only you can decide for yourself.

A hybrid approach just may offer the best of both worlds. An A/V preamplifier/surround-sound processor," or "A/V preamp/processor," houses the following: source switching (audio/video and audio-only), Pro Logic (and, perhaps, THX) processing, ambience simulation (for music listening, if you'll be doing any), and typical audio-preamp functions such as tone control and loudness contouring. Think of it as an A/V receiver minus the amplifiers and radio tuner. You'd plug the audio outputs of your video sources into it just as if it were an A/V receiver. In turn, audio signals would run from the preamp/processor to one multichannel or multiple stereo power amplifiers and then on to your home theater's speakers. One very nice bonus is that most preamp/processors come with a comprehensive remote control, enabling you to control the entire A/V system with one handheld device. Some manufacturers even build tuners into their preamp/processors (making them "preamp/processor/ tuners")—essentially, they're A/V receivers minus the amplification. Manufacturers such as Adcom, B&K, Carver, Denon, Fosgate-Audionics, Harman Kardon, Kenwood, Marantz, NAD, Parasound [see "VideoTest," page 40], Proceed, Sony, and Soundstream, among others, make highly regarded preamp/processors and related compo-

Some audio/videophiles insist on using a separate A/V preamplifier and a separate surround-sound processor in place of an integrated preamp/processor, for many of the reasons I've already mentioned. In many cases, these components are exotic, high-performance devices with beautiful workmanship, and concepts such as art and pride of ownership come into play







From top: NAD Model 910 surround-sound processor, Marantz MA-500 THX monoblock power amplifier, B&K AVP2000 A/V preamplifier

when they're a part of the puzzle—concepts that really don't have a place in nuts-and-bolts discussions of hometheater design. If you're fortunate enough to be free of budgetary constraints, or are inspired to save up for the very best that money can buy, know that Audio Design Associates, Audio Research, Counterpoint, Fosgate-Audionics, Kinergetics, Lexicon, McIntosh, Meridian, Museatex, and Proceed, among others, specialize in this area.

Choosing a specific preamp/processor, or preamp and processor, comes down to simultaneously satisfying two criteria: functionality and sound quality. Sacrifice either one and you'll be sorry. Evaluate functionality first-not because it's more important than sound quality, but because you can do it simply by looking over new-product writeups, ads, and/or company brochures. Once you've eliminated contenders that don't meet your basic needs, you can audition the survivors for sound quality, cosmetics, and "feel" and then make a final selection.

## **VIDEO CONNECTIONS**

In terms of functionality, first be sure that there are enough audio/video inputs. Count up the source components you intend to use and pad the count to provide for the future. To accommodate A/V sources, you'll probably want connections for at least one (and probably two) VCRs, a laserdisc player, and at least one extra component (you know you've been thinking about buying a DBS dish/receiver combo). You might want yet another A/V input for one of the digital videodisc players that are likely to hit next year.

You'll need audio/video outputs to record on at least one of the VCRspreferably two sets to record on either or both at your discretion. You'll also need a video output to drive your TVor two of them if you want to feed a second set in another room. Note that, though you can feed audio signals to two components from a single output by using a Y connector, you can't do the same for video; each TV or subsequent video component must be fed individually from a separate output jack.

Video interconnects come in two varieties, of course: the so-called composite-video type that uses RCA connectors, and the S-Video type that employs a multipin connector and special multiple-conductor cable to carry the chroma (color) information separately from the luminance (black-andwhite) signal. Videophiles shun composite video whenever possible, since it inserts chroma information in the spaces between the luminance information. S-Video cables are more expensive than composite-video coax, but they're far preferable—if your video components are outfitted with compatible connectors, at any rate. Laserdiscs and videotapes store chroma and luminance information separately (as will digital videodiscs), and the TV monitor processes them separately, too. The less combining and separating that occurs in the link, the better the picture will be.

Preamp/processors, and truly separate A/V preamps (as well as A/V receivers, for that matter), route S-Video and composite-video signals along separate paths, and this arrangement may require some rather bizarre wiring arrangements: Though better-equipped controllers have S-Video and composite-video jacks for each video input and output, many provide S connectors only on selected inputs. Since S-Video and composite-video signals are switched and routed separately, you're likely to find you have to double up on the wiring—that is, use both types of cable to get the job done properly.

Say you have a laserdisc player with S-Video and composite-video outputs, a VCR outfitted with just compositevideo RCA jacks, and a TV that's equipped with both—unless you connect the disc player to the processor with both types of cables, you won't be able to dub from the laserdisc player to the VCR (which, remember, only "knows" composite video) and still take advantage of viewing the laserdisc through the superior S link. In addition, unless you also connect the processor to the TV with both types of cable, you won't be able watch a videotape (via the composite link) without similarly limiting the quality of the laserdisc's image. Generally, it's best to double up on the video interconnects wherever possible—as long as your TV does a good job of isolating the individual in-

From top: Pioneer Elite C-72 A/V preamplifier, Carver AV-806x THX multichannel amplifier, Lexicon CP-2 preamplifier/surround-sound processor





Counterpoint HC-808 preamplifier/surround-sound processor

put sources, at least. (To see if your TV does, simply compare one hookup method with the other.) Note that most TVs automatically choose an S-Video feed over a composite feed when both are presented.

## **AUDIO CONNECTIONS**

The controller, or control duo, should also have audio outputs for three front speakers (left, center, and right), two rear "surround" speakers, and a subwoofer (all are musts for any serious home theater). These outputs are connected to power amplifiers or powered speakers via conventional RCA cables; speaker wire will run from the amplification component(s) to the speakers themselves for all nonpowered speakers. A pair of "unprocessed" (stereo) outputs also is handy for sending music to a second room.

Your need for audio inputs revolves around your plans for your home theater. Since, in all likelihood, you'll be dropping a good chunk of change on it,

it'd be nice if you could also use it for playing music; you need audio source components in order to do this, of course. If you're still with me, I'd look for at least three line-level inputs, which can accommodate a CD player, a tuner (if one isn't built into the preamp or preamp/processor itself), and a cassette deck. The tape-deck input should have a recording output, so you can perform tape-to-tape dubbing or offtape monitoring via the preamp/processor. Of course, if your laserdisc player also spins CDs, you can omit the CD input, though a separate CD player is preferable because it's usually much easier to use than an LD player and sound quality is often superior. If you still play LPs, you'll need a phono preamp compatible with your cartridge.





Rotel's RB956AX multichannel amp (\$500) is rated to deliver 30 watts into each of six channels and can be bridged to defy obsolescence. For a true separates approach, try the company's RB970BX amp (\$380)—this lowprofile monster, rated to deliver 60 watts x 2 into each of two channels, kicks out thunderous bass and stunning resolution.... Optimus' Pro LX5. (\$300 a pair) is a great bookshelf speaker; it doesn't have much bass, but the rest is exceptional. It'd make a great main (as long as you've got a subwoofer), and it's a natural for rearchannel surround. . . . Vandersteen's VCC-1 (\$495) is simply the best centerchannel speaker I've heard. The company's Model 1B (shown; \$1,390 a pair) is a full-range wunderspeaker that's just perfect for the front channels of a home theater. —Tom Miller

## **SURROUND SOUND**

Auditioning preamp/processors or separate processors is critical, since all Dolby Pro Logic processors don't sound alike, and it's impossible to distinguish differences among similarly priced models just by perusing spec sheets. You really have to listen.

Some processors react more quickly than others to the shifting "sound images" in a soundtrack, creating firmer, more stable images. These images can—depending on the quality of the soundtrack, the scope of the environment portrayed in a specific scene, and the quality of your speakers—extend well behind, above, and to the sides of your three front speakers and your two

rear speakers; sounds can even seem to emanate from spots beyond your room's walls or ceiling. It's impossible to overstate how thrilling these types of sound effects can be—and how they transform simple movie-watching into an almost participatory experience.

Poorly designed processors may err when routing signals to specific speakers—sounds that are supposed to emanate from the center speaker might "leak" to the front left or right speaker, for example. Some processors may not pan sounds smoothly from side to side or front to back; others may be unacceptably noisy, diverting your attention from the movie or show you're trying to enjoy. A less capable processor may also present a "flat" or compressed sense of space.

The best way to proceed is to use a movie scene that has a lot of ambience and surround effects. Subtle effects are most telling, since the bombast of exaggerated effects such as explosions and the like often covers up the very differences you're trying to discern. (Explosions can be cool, but they quickly grow tiresome; subtleties, on the other hand, will consistently send chills up and down your spine.) One very telling sequence that's perfect for evaluations comes in the last minute or so of "The Face of War," a chapter in the laserdisc of Last of the Mohicans (1992)—it stretches the sonic image in all directions (including a very tough sequence in which characters climb toward the viewer from the bottom of a hill), presents the ambience of a wide 18th-century forest (full of extremely vocal insects), offers a solid center-toright-main-speaker pan, and has some nice, high-resolution surround effects. The level of the soundtrack is also very low during this sequence, so a noisy processor will have nowhere to hide.

Straight Dolby Pro Logic isn't the only way to get surround sound, though. You should also consider "enhanced" Pro Logic systems, especially those that "decorrelate" the two surround channels so that they don't deliver a solid image (Dolby Stereo movies are supposed to have diffuse surround "soundfields," not firmly established ones). Many processors employ digital signal processing to enhance standard Pro Logic; audition these modes as you would normal Pro Logic.

The most well established system of Pro Logic enhancement is "THX," a creation of Lucasfilm Ltd., the Holly-

## TOP AUDIO EXOTICS

Conrad-Johnson Design's Premier Eight-A (\$8,000) is a 275-watt vacuumtube monoblock amp. Power? Yes. Finesse? Definitely! You'll need five of them for surround sound.... Jadis' [1 Drive (\$12,500), a CD transport, is the single most gorgeous audio product in the world. You could buy an entire THX system for half the price. . . . but who cares?.... From a performance standpoint, Kinergetics' KSP-2 (\$4,500) is the Dolby Pro Logic processor. . . . Machined from solid block of aluminum and powered by separate DC battery pack, the Coherence (\$12,900), from Jeff Rowland Design Group, is the freshest solid-state preamp from one of the world's most respected designers. . . . Imposing, unlimited, refined . . . Wilson Audio's X-1/Grand SLAMME (shown; \$64,500 a pair) is the speaker that turned the normally unflappable high-ticket audio world on its ear.



wood colossus spawned by George Lucas. THX doesn't actually sell hometheater components; it simply establishes guidelines for performance and certifies components (after receiving a licensing fee) that follow them. Thus, you'll run across a component like Kenwood's KC-X1, a THX-approved preamp/processor/tuner with THX-enhanced surround processing.

In addition to decorrelating the surround channels (for the reason noted above), THX-approved processors "reequalize" rear-channel signals to account for the way that human beings hear: If identical sounds were to simultaneously arrive at our ears from the front and from the sides of a room, we'd perceive them as being different. Re-equalization attempts to square things. THX processors also equalize the front channels to recreate the tonal balance of a theater in the home. Though THX has also established guidelines for power amplifiers and speakers, and manufacturers offer THX-approved models in these component categories, you don't have to have them to benefit from the surroundsound enhancements offered by THX processors. The same goes for THXcertified laserdiscs [see "Eyes on the Prize," page 261.

Whether you need "ambience-simulation" circuitry is simply a matter of

personal preference. These surround-sound modes are meant to be used when playing music (or any type of video that isn't Dolby-encoded) over your home theater's multiple speakers. Know that it takes high-quality circuitry to "simulate" realistic effects, and separate processors are more likely to provide it than average A/V receivers. As always, a thorough listening evaluation should provide the answers.

It's hard to be thorough in the typical retail environment, though. This is the case even in specialty A/V shops (where providing good service is a way of life), since it can be tough to focus on sonic subtleties unless you "live with" a product for a week or so. That's why you'll be able to do your most telling comparisons at home—in your room, with your TV, VCR or laserdisc player. and speakers, and at your leisure. And that's one very good reason to shop at a specialty store, since the salespeople there understand the merits of at-home auditions and know that they can be an integral part of making you happy.

# **AMPLIFICATION**

Power amplification is perhaps the most compelling reason to take the separates approach. It's a large subject in and of itself [see "Power Trip," June 1995, for a detailed discussion and a CONTINUED ON PAGE 83



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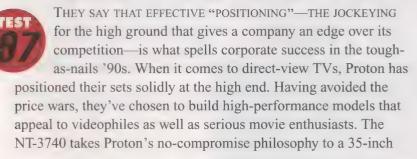
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# Set Assets Proton's NT-3740 makes a bold



screen size. The 3740 (\$3,000), which measures 30.25 x 37.5 x 24.5 inches (h/w/d) and weighs a hefty 185 pounds, is the company's first 35-inch set. It's equipped with a nice roster of features, including dual-tuner picture-in-picture (PIP)—with still-frame, strobe, and channel-scan functions-that can be placed in any of the tube's four corners. The set also features closed-captioning and a 3.58-MHz trap filter to help clean up low-quality input sources. Channel block can be set up to prevent family members from watching specific programs. And the clock/timer can be used to switch the set on or off at specific times.

The 3740 also covers the bases in terms of connections. There are three rear-panel A/V inputs, including two S-Video inputs. One A/V and one S-Video output are on tap. And the front panel offers one A/V input and one S-Video input for easy hookup of a camcorder, videogame console, or extra VCR. Two antenna inputs are provided. Finally, terminals are on hand for driving a pair of external speakers with the set's built-in power amplifiers.

Audio provisions are basic but beefy:

The speakers are biamplified threeways; the internal power amplifiers drive the woofers with 18 watts each, the midranges and tweeters with 5 watts each. The SPACE function adds various degrees of ambience; it has three settings—MOVIE, MUSIC, and MONO-and can also be defeated. The set is capable of receiving stereo broadcasts and cablecasts, of course.

On the technical front, the 3740 uses a dark-tint tube with an Invar Shadow Mask. The set also employs a digital comb filter to separate chrominance (color) and luminance (black-andwhite) information; other Protons use an analog comb.

The 3740's manual doesn't get into many details, but it's clear and concise. The remote is on the small side and, except for the power, volume, and channel up/down keys, all of the buttons are small and identically shaped; this layout makes the remote a little difficult to handle. In addition, the remote isn't backlit-a disappointment

considering the set's high-end stance (and price tag). On the other hand, the on-screen menus are easy to use, whether they're accessed via the remote or from the front-panel controls.

Proton's sets always seem to deliver a pleasing picture right out of the box, and the 3740 was no exception: It delivered a seductive picture with its controls set to the factory-preset positions; colors looked nice and rich, and skin tones were particularly realistic. This admirable condition can be explained, perhaps, by the fact that Proton sets are sold in specialty A/V shops, not in chain-type electronics superstores, where pushing a set's controls to their maximum is necessary to grab a customer's attention. Most people will find the 3740's picture looks breathtaking without any significant adjustments. Purists will want to do some fiddling, of course.

I first brought the BRIGHTNESS control down a couple of clicks, since test patterns from the A Video Standard laserdisc (an excellent, all-around aid for adjusting your TV) indicated that blacks weren't quite as black as they should be. (Blacks can also be judged using any widescreen laserdisc in which the black bars above and below the image don't match the blacks in the program's night scenes.) You also lose some fine detail in dimly lit scenes when brightness (black-level) is set too high.

Bringing the CONTRAST control down (to two clicks below its midpoint) minimized video noise; because it also lowered the set's light output (to 23.7 footlamberts, which is excellent for a 35inch TV), it should also extend the life of the picture tube.

I brought the DETAIL (sharpness) control down as far as it could go. If you're a regular reader, you know that a sharpness control doesn't do what its name implies—it's actually a peaking circuit similar to the treble control on an A/v receiver. This control should be lowered until hard white edges around objects ("ringing") disappear; video noise will also be lessened.

With these adjustments, test patterns indicated that resolution was very solid (410 lines horizontal, 500 lines vertical), overscan (at about 5 percent) was better than average, and convergence was excellent. Gray-scale delineation was quite good, indicating that the power supply remained stable at different output levels.

Fine-tuning color was, as usual, a little more complicated. Using the test disc's color-bar pattern and the blue filter that comes with the disc, I set the COLOR control to one notch above its midpoint and TINT to a click-and-a-half above its midpoint. The picture looked really nice at this point. A followup check with the color bars indicated, however, that the set was giving the yellow bars a slight orange/yellow cast, a typical side effect when fleshtone-enhancing circuitry is onboard. A call to Proton determined that the 3740's color decoder was purposefully set to "warm" the picture a bit (though they're re-evaluating this choice).

## BY THE NUMBERS

Measurements by Berger-Braithwaite Labs

Horizontal resolution: 410 lines
Picture S/N: luminance, 54.6 dB; video,
54.1 dB; chroma AM, 64.1 dB; chroma
PM, 63.7 dB

Screen brightness: preset, 50.3 footlamberts; after adjustment, 23.7 footlamberts
Color temperature: preset, 7,100 degrees
Kelvin; after calibration, 6,500 degrees
Kelvin

Color temperature measured 7,100 degrees Kelvin on the top of the gray scale and 8,500 degrees at the bottom. In comparison to most direct-views set to their factory positions, these numbers were remarkably close to the industry standard of 6,500 degrees; only a few other consumer TVs offer this kind of accuracy (usually from their WARM factory setting). Note that Proton offers buyers the option of having their set calibrated to a color temperature of 6,500 degrees. Purists who are able to watch their sets in an ideal environment—one with very little ambient light in the room, and with the light source positioned behind the setshould consider this option: After I'd calibrated it, the 3740 measured a dead-accurate 6,500 degrees up and down the scale, and it tracked the gray scale flawlessly.

At this point, the 3740 looked awesome: Blacks were a true, deep black, and pictures had lots of detail and were virtually noise-free, particularly in dimly lit scenes. Images had a stunning depth and three-dimensionality.

I also liked the 3740's audio system—it was easily the best I've heard from a TV set. To get the most out of high-fidelity soundtracks, of course, it's still best to use a complete surround-sound system. The nice part is that if you're starting out from scratch, or can only afford the 3740 at the outset, its built-in amps and speakers will carry you in style until you can upgrade.

PROTON'S NT-3740 IS A VERY FINE 35-INCH TV, delivering just what you'd expect from a topnotch direct-view bigscreen. It offers a nice complement of features, a generous array of connections, and a fine sound system. And its picture looks terrific out of the box, with performance that vaults to spectacular heights when it's carefully adjusted. If you're looking for a truly big direct-view big-screen, the 3740 simply demands an audition.

# THE SHORT FORM

#### **PROTON NT-3740**

Component type: 35-inch direct-view TV set Price: \$3,000

Target: Videophiles, movie buffs, and serious home-theater enthusiasts

Minimum requirements\*: Hi-Fi VCR, A/v receiver, main, center,
and surround speakers

#### **KEY FEATURES**

■ Channel block ■ Dual-tuner PIP with advanced features ■ Two
 S-Video inputs ■ Front-panel A/V inputs ■ Beefy audio system
 ■ Digital comb filter ■ Wireless remote control

#### SUMMARY

■ A generous complement of connections ■ Great sound ■ Excellent images, with deep blacks, high resolution, low noise, and stunning depth; yellows, however, are slightly "warm" ■ Can be professionally calibrated for 6,500-degree color temperature ■ Delivers topnotch 35-inch performance

Circle 100 on reader service card

\*To maximize its potential

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THE SATELLITE SYSTEM WITH THE BEST VIEW





# Parasound's P/SP-1000 is a prodigious

PREAMPLIFIER/SURROUND-SOUND PROCESSORS ARE BOTH the brain and circulatory system of the home-theater body. A well-designed model makes interacting with your system a breeze and routes all the various surround-sound signals efficiently and effectively, without degradation. Parasound's P/SP-1000 does such a fine job of circulating that it wouldn't be out of place in the latest edition of *Gray's Anatomy*. 

The 1000 is one of a flurry of new components that's intended to bridge the gap

between high-end, big-ticket surroundsound processors and standard A/V receivers or stripped-down processors. In a nutshell, the 1000 offers most of the functions delivered by conventional stereo preamplifiers along with fully integrated video switching, high-quality Dolby Pro Logic surround decoding, and three surround modes for non-Dolby programming. Its clever design enables the 1000 to serve either as a standalone A/V preamplifier/decoder or as an adjunct to a conventional twochannel audio-only preamplifier. And it does all of this at a price-\$750that should suit system builders who have one eye fixed on the state-of-theart horizon and the other firmly on the bottom line.

The 1000's chassis is low and wide, conforming to the rack-mount standard

(19 inches wide and 3.5 high). Its layout is straightforward: A single goodsized volume knob can be found to the right. Rows of switches are on hand for input and surround-mode selection, independent channel-level balancing, and more. Two smaller knobs provide conventional stereo-mode balancing and sensitivity adjustment for the audio inputs; the sensitivity knob has a detent at its center denoting "0.3-volt input sensitivity."

Two front-panel features require a little explanation: The UNIFIED SOUND FIELD CENTER button is said (in the owner's manual) to "contour and blend center-channel information back to the front left and right channels to present a seamless front x-axis soundstage." The BASS EQ button offers narrow-band bass equalization "for systems using

smaller or in-wall speakers without a subwoofer."

The 1000 is generally well endowed in terms of connections. In addition to three A/V and two audio-only inputs, the TAPE audio set is a full in/out record/play loop. You can plug an audio source component like a CD player into LINE/AUDIO, but it can also accept a feed from an audio-only preamp that presents its own source-selection buttons. In this configuration, turning off the 1000 via its front-panel switch automatically loops the LINE/AUDIO input back to a second pair of main (left/ right) outputs, marked BYPASS. The idea is that the 1000 can be inserted without reservation into a serious audiophile system, since you'll only be adding a gold-plated relay and a foot or so of connecting cable in the system's two-channel signal path. Note that all of the 1000's video inputs and outputs are supplied in both S-Video and composite configurations. All back-panel jacks are gold-plated.

Also found on the 1000's back panel are two small three-position toggle switches. One selects center-channel mode; your options are NONE, SMALL, and LARGE. The second toggle sets the crossover tied to the 1000's line-level

subwoofer output; the choices are 80 HZ, 120 HZ, and FULL RANGE.

Internal construction is impressive. The 1000 has a high-current regulated power supply that's said to extend bass and dynamics, "high-speed analog circuitry" with buffered outputs, and precision components, including 1-percent-precision metal-film resistors and polystyrene and polypropylene capacitors. I observed a power supply that looked as if it would be at home in a small power amp, better-grade parts (including top-shelf amplifying devices and the familiar, high-end-standard Analog Devices SSM-2126A analog Pro Logic decoder LSI), and an excellent-quality multichannel motorized volume pot connected via very highend cabling.

I installed the 1000 in a high-performance home-theater system. Hooking up the 1000 presented no particular problems. Calibrating relative levels for the front, center, and surround channels was also easy: The 1000's Pro Logic-standard sequenced noise signal must be manually advanced channel to channel, as prompted by successive strokes of the remote control's TEST key. This is a welcome improvement over many auto-cycling sequencers, since they cycle a bit fast for my taste (and for an SPL meter's settling time). And the 1000's master-volume "tracking" proved to be excellent: After I'd

#### BY THE NUMBERS

Measurements by Simon Labs

Channel separation (at 1,000 Hz, referenced to a 1-volt output): Preamp Direct, 80 dB; DPL, front left/right, 38 dB; front left/center, 45 dB; front right/left, 34 dB; front right/center, 50 dB; center/front left, 32 dB; center/front right, 36 dB; center/rear left, 52 dB; center/rear right, 55 dB; rear/ center, 55 dB; rear/front left and right, 45 dB

Frequency response: Preamp Direct, 20 to 20,000 Hz +0, -0.2 dB; DPL, front left/ right, 20 to 20,000 Hz +0, -0.7 dB, center, 200 to 20,000 Hz +0, -1 dB, rear left/right, 20 to 6,800 Hz +1, -3 dB

THD+noise (1 volt in/out): Preamp Direct, <0.05%, 10 to 100,000 Hz; DPL, front left/ right, <0.1%, 20 to 100,000 Hz, center, <0.12%, 200 to 20,000 Hz, rear left/right, <0.8%, 100 to 5,000 Hz

S/N (A-weighted, referenced to 1 volt): Preamp Direct, left, 80 dB, right, 79 dB; DPL, left, 78 dB, right, 79 dB, center, 80 dB, rear left, 72 dB, rear right, 73 dB

Input overload (LINE/DIRECT input with trim at detent): DPL, left/right, 2.5 volts; center, 2.2 volts; rear left/right, 1.6 volts

balanced them, the channels' relative levels remained perfectly balanced over a very wide range of volume settings (40 dB and more). This is critical—if levels go out of balance every time you change the master volume, you'll have to rebalance them every time you touch the volume knob.

The 1000's excellent design translated into excellent performance. In Pro-Logic mode, the preamp/processor provided very good transparency and detail as well as outstanding dynamics. The 1000 did a fine job of steering soundtrack elements to my system's speakers, with very minimal "leakage" between channels and smooth, natural pans from side to side and front to back. What leakage there was-from the center to one of the mains, for example—was stable and consistent,

rather than jerky. Fine soundtrack details had excellent resolution; Ambient scenes with lots of natural sounds were open and airy, and subtle Foley elements like rustling papers and creaking chairs sounded natural and balanced.

The 1000 tended a shade toward the brighter side of things in its straight Pro Logic mode, though never obtrusively so. Engaging the UNIFIED SOUND FIELD CENTER function mellowed things out substantially, however. Ultimately, I was of two minds regarding this refinement: With some scenes, USFC seemed to smooth out center-channel dialogue and do a better job of integrating frontstage sounds. But with others, its action was too severe, lending a vaguely muffled quality to speech and center-channel effects and obscuring small details.

The BASS EQ function did a great job, introducing a sharp, peaking action at 40 Hz and below. This did wonders in my reference system, whose main speakers deliver solid output to 40 Hz or so but fall off below that point. It did induce some mild midbass boominess, but it was livable, and I still preferred the circuit switched in with most "big"

The 1000 also did a very fine job with music. In straight stereo, using the PRE-AMP-DIRECT mode, the preamp/processor proved transparent. And the 1000's additional sound modes—STADIUM, HALL, and CLUB-proved useful as well, though to various degrees with specific types of music.

All of the 1000's outputs produced a bit of noise. It was minimal in the LINE/DIRECT mode and never reached bothersome levels in any mode, and it was wholly inaudible when a program was playing. It was more evident—and took on a faintly modulating characteristic at the surround outputs—when Pro Logic was selected, but even when

CONTINUED ON PAGE 84

# THE SHORT FORM

#### PARASOUND P/SP-1000

Component type: A/V preamplifier/surround-sound processor Price: \$750

Target: Serious home-theater enthusiasts Minimum requirements\*: 27-inch TV, Hi-Fi VCR, four-channel power amp, main, center, and surround speakers

## **KEY FEATURES**

■ Dolby Pro Logic decoding ■ CLUB, HALL, and STADIUM surround modes ■ Preamp-Direct mode ■ Center-channel enhancement ■ Low-bass equalization - Accommodates three A/V sources and two audio-only sources - LINE/AUDIO inputs and main BYPASS ouputs - Gold-plated S-Video and composite connectors 

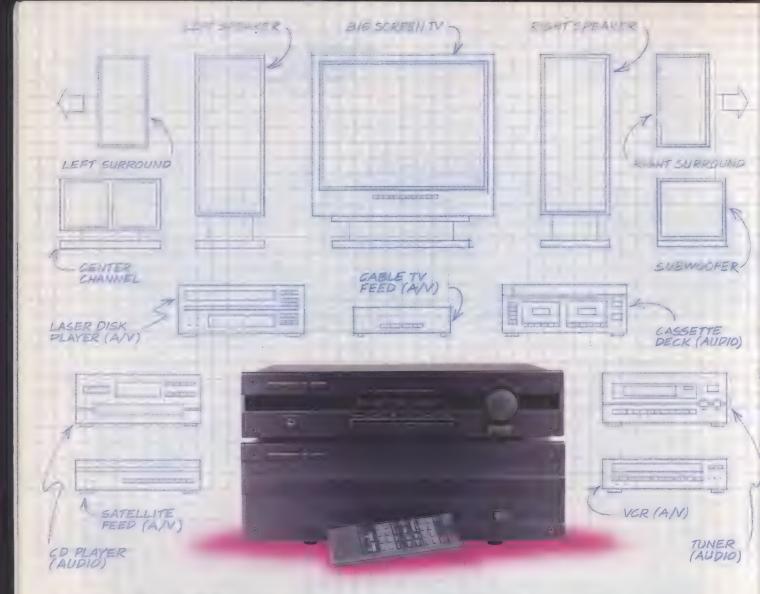
Subwoofer output with three-position active crossover ■ Compatible with infrared-repeater system ■ Manual noise sequencer . Wireless remote control

#### SUMMARY

■ Layout is straightforward ■ Generally well endowed in terms of connections ■ Internal construction is impressive ■ Excellent sound with movies and music ■ Almost entirely transparent to video signals ■ All channels produced a bit of noise ■ Lacks a front-panel or on-screen display ■ Has a very small circle of peers

Circle 101 on reader service card

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# LDIADO Mitsubishi's M-V7057 laserdisc player comes close to perfection



IN LIFE, SATISFACTION IS OFTEN A MATTER OF SIMPLY determining your needs and then making your best effort to fulfill them. If all of your driving is restricted to a weekly jaunt to the supermarket, for example, you really don't need a Porsche. Likewise, if all you're interested in is watching movies start to finish, Mitsubishi's M-V7057 would probably be overkill. Now don't get me wrong—it's a terrific movie machine. It's just that it does so much more. And if more is what you're after, the

digitally driven M-V7057 (\$1,099) is a great place to start.

One high-profile feature that's likely to mean a great deal several months down the road is the V7057's backpanel RF port. It may not look like much, but it's actually a gateway to the next generation of home-theater surround sound: The port lets you feed the LD player's audio output into a processor or A/V receiver that's equipped for Dolby Surround AC-3, the digital, "5.1"-channel heir to Dolby Pro Logic. While such AC-3 components are extremely scarce (and pricey) today, they

should become more plentiful (and more affordable) over the next 12 months. The point is that the V7057 will be ready to take the high ground with you, come what may.

Otherwise, the V7057's extra capabilities revolve around its digital video electronics. Ever since the dawn of the LD format back in the late '70s, there's been a line drawn between two types of laserdiscs: CAV (constant angular velocity), and CLV (constant linear velocity). Some of the LD format's most entertaining features, like the ability to view still frames and slow-motion

playback with astounding clarity, are usually available only when playing CAV discs. Since most feature films are released only in the CLV format (with a few rare and pricey exceptions), special effects are often unavailable. That's where the digital video electronics come in: If you have them, you can enjoy all types of digital special effects with either type of disc.

The V7057 is an excellent example of what can be done when modern digital-video technology is merged with the original analog laserdisc format. Film-literate users can analyze cinematic editing in slow motion, for example, or pour over still frames to study picture composition. And the 7057 offers just about every bell and whistle you could want, including the ability to automatically switch sides of an LD. Other features include a dedicated tray for music CDs, a digital time-base corrector, a comprehensive digital video-noise-reduction circuit, and practically every type of output connection that can be imagined.

Measuring 5.5 x 16.6 x 17.25 inches (h/w/d) and weighing 18.5 pounds, the V7057 has a solid look and feel. The fluorescent front-panel display is a cool blue with red accents. For minimum distraction, the display can be switched off, leaving just one or two appropriately dim LEDs illuminated. There's no power light when the unit is on; when turned off, a small red LED glows. A 0.25-inch headphone jack and a dedicated volume control sit in the lower-left corner of the front panel.

Besides the basic motion controls, the front panel features a true jog/shuttle control that's slightly easier to use than the jog shuttle on the unit's wireless remote control. Also on the front panel are side-change buttons, forward and reverse chapter-scan buttons, and a DIRECT CD button that activates the smaller CD-size tray (you can also place CDs in the center of the 12-inch LD tray). The HILITE/INTRO SCAN button plays the first few seconds of each chapter of an LD. Repeat, programplay, random-play, and video noise-reduction buttons are also provided.

And then there's the DIGITAL MEMORY button. Not recalling it from the other Mits LD players I've reviewed, I pressed it and noted a flashing green light. Whatever it indicated wasn't obvious, so I consulted the owner's manual. I discovered that pressing this button prompts the player to grab a digital freeze frame and hold it for display when the disc is stopped or ejected. The frame is discarded during side changes, however, and this feature isn't

active in the pause mode—only in the stop mode. Frankly, I found DIGITAL MEMORY confusing.

The THEATER MODE switch is a nice touch, especially when used in conjunction with DISPLAY OFF (which blanks the display as well as transforms blue backgrounds to black during disc pauses, stops, or side changes): TM speeds up the transition from a disc's first side to its second. I clocked transition time at 8 and 12 seconds with TM turned on and off, respectively. The only drawback: You can't use the advanced editing, programming, or random-playback features when viewing the disc's second side with TM engaged.

The V7057's remote is well laid out and surprisingly compact, considering the inclusion of a true jog/shuttle dial and illuminated motion-control buttons. A large, easy-to-find button along the left edge activates the light, which illuminates the most often-used buttons for 3 seconds. Annoyingly, pressing the pause button blanks the screen, rather than freezing the current frame. You can, however, readily jump into the freeze-frame mode by pressing the step buttons (forward and reverse frame advance) or by activating the jog dial. Jog activation requires pressing the jogmode button, which glows red until you change modes.

The jog dial, located in the middle of the shuttle ring, lets you dial frame by frame in forward or reverse. As noted, the V7057's excellent digital videomemory electronics offer lots of special effects with both CAV and CLV discs.

#### BY THE NUMBERS

Measurements by Berger-Braithwaite Labs

Horizontal resolution: 415 lines
Picture S/N: unweighted luminance, 51.6
dB; weighted luminance, 59.1 dB;
unweighted video, 51.1 dB; weighted
video, 58.5 dB; chroma AM, 54.3 dB;
chroma PM, 49.9 dB

Audio frequency response: digital, 10 to 20,000 Hz +0, -1.7 dB; analog, 20 to 20,000 Hz +2.5. -2 dB

Dynamic range: 96 dB Audio S/N: digital, exceeded 104 dB;

analog, 65 dB

You can move frame by frame, perform a quick search, or view a still frame with perfect clarity. Choices for bidirectional slow-motion playback speed are 1/90TH, 1/30TH, 1/16TH, 1/8TH, 1/4TH, 1/2, 1X, 2X, and 3X normal speed (indicated on-screen).

Though the owner's manual notes that slow motion works only with CAV discs, I thought it did fine with CLV discs—and in both directions, to boot. In fact, all of the special effects worked with CLV discs. The only difference is in your access to a disc's "interior"—only CAV discs offer frame-number access, while CLV discs go by elapsed time. (In both cases, finding a particular point on a disc is made reasonably easy via the remote's CHAPTER button and numeric keypad—but I still would've preferred an even simpler "go-to" button.)

Other operating conveniences include an A-B repeat system, for automatically replaying any selected section of a disc, an audio-channel (left/right/stereo) and track (digital or analog) selector, a display button that shows remaining time, audio status, and elapsed time (or frame number with CAV discs), and an auto-edit button for copying CDs onto cassettes.

Having already exhausted most of the new releases offered at my local laser-disc-rental shop (I guess I should count myself lucky to even have such an establishment nearby), I settled on two special selections for my V7057 test-drive: A new release of The Concert for Bangladesh, the 1971 film featuring George Harrison, Ringo Starr, Eric Clapton, and Bob Dylan, Though it looks like it was shot on grainy 16MM film, the music sounded great and appealed to the old hippie in me. For something a bit more visually splendid, I also checked out Caro Diario ("Dear CONTINUED ON PAGE 84

# THE SHORT FORM

#### MITSUBISHI M-V7057

Component type: Laserdisc player Price: \$1,099

Target: Videophiles and movie buffs

Minimum requirements\*: 27-inch TV, A/V receiver, main, center,
and surround speakers

## KEY FEATURES

- Digital special effects with both CAV and CLV discs AC-3-ready RF port
  - Variable digital video-noise reduction Dual-sided laserdisc play
  - CD-direct playback with dedicated CD drawer Digital time-base corrector ■ Wireless remote control with true jog-shuttle dial

#### SUMMARY

■ Loaded with useful features ■ Superb video performance ■ Very good audio performance ■ This machine comes very close to perfection

Circle 102 on reader service card

\*To maximize its potential

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screen TVs and digital surround sound. We have had an ongoing relationship with the people at Dolby Laboratories, creators of Dolby Surround Sound, since Henry Kloss introduced the *first* consumer products with Dolby noise reduction over 20 years ago. And now at Cambridge SoundWorks we believe we have set a new price-to-performance standard for home theater components.

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# **Center Channel Speakers**

Cambridge SoundWorks manufactures three speakers for use as center channel speakers in Dolby Pro Logic home theater systems. All three are magnetically shielded so they can be placed near a TV or computer monitor. *Model Ten-A* is a small, affordable two-

way speaker. \$79%.

Center Channel is essentially identical

liptovites deep output was obtain level...they open of system for output was obtain level...they open outpu

to a Cambridge SoundWorks *Ensemble* satellite (but with magnetic shielding). \$14999. *Center Channel Plus* uses an ultralow, ultra-wide design that is ideal for placement above (or, with optional support stand, below) a TV monitor. \$21999.

# **Surround Speakers**

Cambridge SoundWorks makes two "dipole radiator" surround sound speakers. Dolby Laboratories recommends dipole radiator speakers for use as surround speakers. *The* 

Surround has a very high power handling capacity and is often selected for "high end" surround sound systems.

Audio, describing a system that included The Surround said,

"In many ways the surround sensation was every bit as good as far more expensive installations." \$399° pr. The smaller *The Surround II* is arguably the country's best value in a dipole radiator speaker. \$249° pr.

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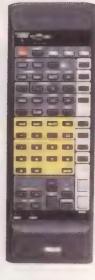
CIRCLE NO. 29 ON READER SERVICE CARD



# On a Roll Yamaha's RX-V690 A/V receiver pours on the value

pours on the value





THERE'S A RESTAURANT IN CHICAGO THAT IS, VERY POSSIBLY, the finest on Earth. It's called Charlie Trotter's, and it serves some of the most amazing nouvelle cuisine on the planet. If you ever visit, put your trust in the chef and his

eclectic tasting menu: You'll be treated to a variety of courses, each of which packs an incredible array of flavors and textures into a small, beautifully presented dish. Now I'm not just rambling; the companies that build A/V receivers have a lot in common with this

establishment. As the home-theater revolution plunges ahead, manufacturers continue to pack—like Chef Trotter and his exquisite creations—ever more amplifier power, performance, and features into their small, nicely presented receivers. And you can get a new highperformance A/V receiver, like Yamaha's RX-V690, for about the price of dinner for four at Charlie T's.

The V690 is an excellent example of the Bold New Receiver. Its feature menu is extensive, and it serves up very respectable power-all at a price-\$699—that's actually lower than its precursor (the estimable RX-V670). The V690 outperforms the V670 in other ways, too. The V690 delivers

more power: 80 watts to each of the left, center, and right channels (with 0.04 percent THD) plus 25 watts x 2 for the surrounds (with 0.3 percent THD), all rated over the channels' full operating bandwidths. And unlike the V670, the V690 has a line-level subwoofer output with a 200-Hz low-pass cutoff; preamp-outs for all four channels make system expansion a snap. (Need more power? Just plug it in.) And there's a sprinkling of S-Video connections.

Yamaha's expertise with digital signal processing (DSP) is also on display. The V690 offers the company's Cinema DSP package, which employs a fully digital implementation of Dolby Pro Logic to handle movies, TV shows, videos, and music-plus nine additional DSP surround modes for both A/V and audio-only material (the V670 included "just" six modes). And there's a loaded learning remote control-preprogrammed with Yamaha component codes, of course.

Like I said, there's a lot packed into a relatively small dish. To learn how well it all works, I installed the V690 in m high-performance home-theater system and asked it to power full-range floorstanding speakers left and right, a wide-range center-channel speaker, and excellent dipolar surround speakers. Source components included laserdisc and CD players, DirecTV and USSB programming, and a VHS Hi-Fi VCR.

The V690 is conceived along triedand-true A/V lines: A single large volume knob (with a lighted indicator on the rim) is complemented by three smaller knobs managing balance, bass, and treble. Somewhat unusually, this trio remains active in all of the surround modes in addition to two-channel stereo, though it affects only the left/right channels. Pushbuttons account for the rest of the V690's control scheme, with segregated groups for A/V-source and surround-mode selection as well as tuner operation. (Tuner controls include manual and auto-seek tuning, 40 presets, and a robot function that automatically loads the presets with the 40 strongest stations it encounters as it sweeps across the dial.) Front-panel connections include a quartet of VIDEO-AUX input jacks, including stereo audio inputs and both composite and S-Video inputs, convenient for accommodating camcorders, dubbing VCRs, or game systems.

Out back, the V690 supplies inputs and outputs for three A/V sources-including VCR-1, VCR-2, and a playbackonly source marked LD/TV-as well as three audio-only sources (phono, CD, and a full tape loop). Of the A/V sources, only VCR-2 and the monitor output (as well as the aforementioned front-panel VIDEO-AUX) are equipped with S-Video jacks; since video signals can't be translated between the S and composite formats, this means that a mixed-format system (including any that uses an LD player) will need to use up two video inputs on the system's TV-one S-Video, one RCA-composite—which you'd then need to select between depending on the source.

Speaker outputs are furnished via dual sets of five-way binding posts with standard spacing for two sets of mains (selected with manual front-panel switches) and lighter-duty spring-terminals for the center and surround

speakers; I really wish manufacturers wouldn't skimp on the center and surround terminals. You can hook up two center speakers to the V690; you might want to employ a pair of small centers if you're using a large projection TV and can't get your hands on an appropriately large center speaker.

The 60-key remote control has a good layout, though most of the keys are identically sized and shaped, which makes by-touch operation (the kind you're likely to do in a dark room) harder. Only MASTER VOLUME and DE-LAY TIME get oversized keys, and the latter seems an odd choice; CENTER LEVEL or channel up/down are likely to get more use. Keys are sensibly grouped by function, however, and the main volume and mute keys are where they belong—in a bottom corner, where they're easy to find.

Hooking up the V690 was easy enough (the manual is well organized and features lots of diagrams), and balancing speaker levels using the receiver's on-board noise sequencer was straightforward. I found that the sequencer cycles from channel to channel very quickly—fine for by-ear adjustment, but too fast for a sound-pressurelevel meter to "settle" fully (if you're using one). More importantly, volume tracking proved nearly perfect—that is, the V690's multichannel output stays balanced at any master-volume setting; lesser designs don't, requiring frequent (and frequently annoying) rebalancing.

## BY THE NUMBERS

Measurements by Hammer Labs

Maximum power (at 1,000 Hz and 0.1% THD): main (worst channel), 110.5 watts into 8 ohms, 168.4 watts into 4 ohms; center, 108.8 watts into 8 ohms, 165.2 watts into 4 ohms; rear (worst channel), 28.4 watts into 8 ohms, 52 watts into 4 ohms

Dynamic power: main (worst channel), 133.6 watts into ■ ohms, 207.5 watts into 4 ohms; center, 129.5 watts into 8 ohms, 194.8 watts into 4 ohms; rear (worst channel), 31.6 watts into ■ ohms, 53.8 watts into 4 ohms

THD+noise (at rated power): main, 0.035%; center, 0.18%; rear, 0.29%

A-weighted S/N (referred to 1 watt): main. 83.7 dB; center, 81.4 dB; rear, 74.8 dB

Frequency response (referred to 1 watt): main, 20-20,000 Hz +0, -0.2 dB; center, 100-20,000 Hz +0, -2.9 dB; rear, 48-6,500 Hz +0.9, -3 dB

Channel separation (at 1,000 Hz): front left/front right, 39.4 dB; front left/center, 41.2 dB; front left/rear, 53.3 dB; front right/ front left, 40.4 dB; front right/center, 42.2 dB; front right/rear, 54.7 dB; center/front left, 41.8 dB; center/front right, 36.6 dB; center/rear, 55.2 dB; rear/front left, 43.4 dB; rear/front right, 38.4 dB; rear/center,

The V690 story only gets better when you start up a movie. It offers, as you'll recall, 10 surround modes. Three of these-PRO LOGIC, PRO LOGIC/EN-HANCED, and 70MM THEATER—are a digital implementation of, and enhancements on, standard Dolby Pro Logic. They're intended for use with Dolby Surround-encoded sources, primarily movies; all are based on the Dolby Surround matrix decoding system. The PRO LOGIC mode worked very well, with extremely low levels of interchannel "leakage" and generally clean, dynamic operation. (Noise was low in all modes; in the three Pro Logic-based settings, it shouldn't prove audible under real-world listening conditions.) Channel-to-channel pans were smooth and believable, and overall tonal balance remained natural and nonintrusive

The ENHANCED and 70MM modes employ Cinema DSP's "extra" DSP to spread surround-channel sound more widely along your room's side and back walls; 70MM uses additional DSP wizardry to juice up the spread between the front left/right channels as well. Depending on the soundtrack, both modes deliver very audible effects (particularly 70MM), with a "deeper," larger surround effect. A very nice touch (and an

CONTINUED ON PAGE 85

# THE SHORT FORM

#### YAMAHA RX-V690

Component type: A/V receivier Price: \$699

Target: Quality-conscious home-theater enthusiasts Minimum requirements\*: 27-inch TV set, Hi-Fi VCR, main, center, and surround speakers

#### **KEY FEATURES**

■ Cinema DSP: Digital Dolby Pro Logic decoding, two Pro Logic enhancements, and seven other surround modes • Rated to deliver 80 watts x 3 plus 25 watts x 2 ■ Line-level subwoofer output with 200-Hz low-pass filter Preamp-level outputs for all channels Three A/V input/output sets

■ Front-panel VIDEO -AUX inputs ■ Three audio-only inputs ■ 40 tuner presets Learning remote control

#### SUMMARY

■ Tried-and-true layout ■ Easy to upgrade ■ Hookup is simple ■ Excellent Pro Logic performance ■ Other surround modes can be useful

■ Main and center power was very sturdy ■ Surround power strained a bit at very high levels ■ Has a very good tuner ■ High-performance, high-value

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Sound&Vision Critics' Choice Awards

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# A/V components reviewed, in brief

# SHORTWARE

# More for Less Zenith SM2789BT 27-Inch TV Set

T'S THE ULTIMATE EXAMPLE OF trickle-down technology: As the home-theater revolution has us swarming over new TVs, prices are coming down and the feature count is rising. The action is particularly fierce in the 27-inch arena, since that's the entry level for serious home-theater performance. And Zenith's SM2789BT (\$799) is a true contender.

Considering its price, this set is loaded: High-profile features include a StarSight decoder, a high-contrast Chromasharp picture tube, Advanced Video Imaging picture circuitry, multiple single-tuner PIPs with channel review, and a 15-watt sound system with SEq ambience synthesis. Flexibility is on hand thanks to a nice selection of back-panel amenities: two A/v inputs, one S-Video input, loop outputs for an A/v component and a cable decoder, terminals for external speakers, and a variable audio output.

The SM2789BT's picture options are staggering, but with a little work it's possible to enjoy excellent images. The set offers two color-temperature positions, WARM and COOL, which work together with three Picture Preference settings—PRESET, CUSTOM, and THEATER—to let you make dramatic adjustments to the picture. (Note that the color-temp names seem confusing—WARM nets you a redder, warmer picture, while COOL dials in a bluer, cooler picture, but the actual color temperatures that produce reds are cooler, or lower, than the temps that produce



blues.) The set also offers the Video Filter video noise-reduction circuit and the ghoulishly named Auto Flesh fleshtone-enhancement circuit.

It's always instructive to see what a manufacturer's PRESET mode looks like, so I dialed it up. I found that the set automatically shifts to the COOL setting and kicks in the Video Filter and Auto Flesh circuits; not surprisingly, the basic video parameters-contrast, brightness, and so on-jump to their factory-set positions. This is the Dagwood sandwich of picture settings—there's an awful lot of flavors, but you're just not sure what you're tasting: The COOL setting made colors bluer than they should be, ringing (objects having white edges around them) was obvious (indicating either that

SHARPNESS was set too high or that the set uses edge-enhancement circuitry, or both), colors were oversaturated, and there was a fair amount of video noise (made worse if CONTRAST is set too high).

You can switch from COOL to WARM, but when I tried to defeat Auto Flesh and the Video Filter from PRESET, I found that I really couldn't; though one of the menus lets you switch them off, every time you do so the set switches over to CUSTOM, which means that all of the other settings have changed as well. In general, I wasn't knocked out by PRESET.

Checking out the set with a color analyzer and patterns from the *A Video Standard* test disc put me on the right track. With PRESET and COOL, the set's

color temperature measured 11,000 degrees Kelvin and its light output measured 80.3 footlamberts. With CUSTOM and COOL, the color temp remained the same, while light output dropped to 78 footlamberts. The THEATER and COOL modes netted the same color temp and 55 footlamberts. In each mode, the left side of the white window pattern was blooming toward blue, the right side toward yellow. The figures didn't change when I checked out PRESET and THE-ATER with the WARM color-temp setting, though red colors were boosted. Fortunately, the CUSTOM/WARM combo netted 48 footlamberts and 7,400 degrees Kelvin; this Kelvin figure is pretty close to the NTSC standard of 6,500 degrees. In addition, you can defeat Auto Flesh and the Video Filter from

Zenith SM2789BT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 COSMETICS EASE OF USE PERFORMANCE VALUE CIRCLE 104 ON READER SERVICE CARD

CUSTOM. Clearly, this is the combo with which to work.

With CUSTOM and WARM dialed in, I revved up A Video Standard. In CUS-TOM, the CONTRAST, BRIGHTNESS, COL-OR, and TINT controls were at their midpoint, with SHARPNESS set slightly higher. The disc's "PLUGE" (Picture Line-Up Generation Equipment) pattern showed that BRIGHTNESS (blacklevel) and CONTRAST (white-level) were both too low for good gray-scale performance, so I brought both of them about two clicks above their midpoint: so adjusted, the pattern checked out fine, indicating that the SM2789BT has a good power supply.

Using the color-bar pattern, I set TINT to just above its midpoint and COLOR to three notches below its midpoint. The test disc's multiburst pattern showed good detail throughout the frequency range; switching the Video Filter on decreased video noise but also decreased upper-frequency detail, so I left it off. Initially, I brought SHARPNESS all the way down, but eventually I brought it back up six clicks.

Adjustments completed, the SM2789-BT looked damn good. Watching laserdiscs was very satisfying-picture details were pretty impressive, colors were mostly accurate, and the level of video noise was low. The numbers also told a positive story: The resolution chart indicated 410 horizontal lines and 500 vertical lines, and overscan measured about 8 percent, which is just about what you'd expect from a contemporary set.

Even better performance is on tap if you have a technician work with the SM2789BT's internal controls. You can access them via the remote if you know the access code; technicians will, or will know how to get it. Once in, and with the set in its COOL mode, VIDEO contributor (and TV-calibrator) Kevin Miller brought the set's blue and green drives down until we had readings of 29.5 footlamberts, which is excellent, and 6,590 degrees Kelvin, which is just about dead-on the NTSC standard. And

color temp with the WARM mode read 5,400 degrees Kelvin—exactly what you want for watching black-and-white movies. One note: Our sample exhibited slight brightness fluctuations in dark scenes, which should not be true of the model line.

Basic operation of the set is pretty straightforward. The remote has a good design, with channel and volume buttons made of glow-in-the-dark plastic. On the down side, the set's on-screen menus are hard to work with-they take up so much of the screen that you have to disable them to see what effect an adjustment has had and then step your way back to the appropriate menu if you need to make another change.

Fortunately, the SM2789BT is a good enough performer that you shouldn't need to fiddle with its controls much once it's properly adjusted. While it doesn't set performance benchmarks, it has all of the basic performance parameters covered, and it offers a full array of features for a very reasonable price. Give it its due if you're in the market for a 27-inch set. —Peter Barry

# Little Buddha Snell Type M **Bookshelf Speaker**

HERE ARE GOOD REASONS TO USE small speakers in your home-theater system: Small speakers are easy to blend into a room's decor. It's simple to position them so that they deliver every last ounce of their potential. And they're more flexible than large speakers in terms of reassigning them to a new role—from front to rear in a home theater, for example, or from the living room to the bedroom or office. Snell's Type M just may represent the best reason of all, however,

I'll admit from the start that I've never met a Snell I didn't like. Every model I've heard has delivered first-class performance (credit Kevin Voecks, the company's chief designer and a partial product of the Canadian Research Council, which I affectionately refer to as the "Speaker Mafia"). They also look gorgeous. And the Type M holds true to form. On one hand, it's just an ordinary two-way bookshelf speakerbut it just screams "classic."

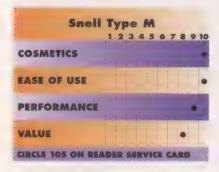
The shape is . . . well, exactly right. I can tell you that it stands 11 x 7.5 x 6 inches (h/w/d), but you just have to see it to appreciate it. The finish is astoundingly elegant (in your choice of oak,





black oak, and walnut)-it's rock-hard. smooth as the proverbial baby's derriere, and perfectly applied. And the rest just drips with detailed, loving touches that bespeak ■ classic sense of industrial design.

The front panel is completely shrouded by a black fabric grille, the frame ushers sound smoothly from the speaker drivers, and signals are routed in through recessed, color-coded dual banana jacks on 0.75-inch centers; the jacks tilt upward slightly to allow easier access to the oversized post holes. Both the 5-inch cast-frame woofer and the 1-inch metal-laminate dome tweeter sit flush in the front panel; the tweeter has a protective metal-mesh cover, a very, very nice touch. Magnetic shielding prevents the Type M from interfer-



ing with your TV picture. All of this doesn't come cheap, though: The Type M costs \$479 apiece.

Rest assured that Snell doesn't subscribe to the nice-house, no-furniture concept. Though you can buy extremely fine performers of similar size for less than a quarter of the Type M's pricetag (Paradigm's Titan, KEF's K-120, and PSB's Alpha come to mind), the Type M truly ups the ante on fit, finish, and precision performance for a speaker of its size.

Measurements reveal extremely flat response in the critical 200 to 10,000-Hz range when you're in front of the speaker, and response remains incredibly smooth as you move to one side or the other. High frequencies roll off fairly quickly as you move above or below the plane of the speaker, which indicates that the room's ceiling and floor won't affect performance significantly. Impedance reached a minimum of 4.2 ohms (at 225 Hz), so a power amp must be able to handle 2-ohm loads if you want to use a single channel to drive two Type Ms. Sensitivity measured 89 dB, indicating that this speaker is a good match for most any amp.



Well-recorded music CDs are great for stressing a speaker, so I primarily listened to the Type Ms as a stereo pair. I immediately discovered that the Type M exhibits Small-Speaker Syndrome that is, it can't reproduce truly low bass. Response started falling off at about 90 Hz, though you will get adequate response down to about 55 Hz when you use a pair in a real-world room. A nice touch is that the Type M did a good job of handling bass below its limits, without thumping or rattling. At high frequencies, the Type M got a little hard-sounding when fed a couple hundred watts (admittedly, that's a lot of power), but it never got fuzzy or came even close to self-destructing.

Stress test completed, I simply listened to the Type M's basic sonic quality—and, once I'd settled in, I found it difficult to tear myself away. It sounded amazing from its "sweet-spot" and almost as good when I moved to one side of the room or the other. Male and female vocals were especially natural-Jennifer Warnes never sounded like she had a cold, and Tom Waits was as gravelly as he must be in real life. And vocal intelligibility was outstanding. Horns, reeds, strings, and percussion were all clean, clear, and detailed.

The "soundstage" was solid, extending well beyond the outer edges of each speaker cabinet and with no midstage holes. There was a nice sense of depth as well, and the Type Ms did a good job of reproducing a sense of spaciousness (given the limitations of a twospeaker setup, as opposed to a fivespeaker surround system).

Snell really has a beaut in the Type M. If a small speaker suits your needs, know that these little dynamos can handle any role in a home-theater system-main, center (when stood vertically), and/or surround. Five of them plus a high-quality subwoofer would be sonic nirvana. If you simply must have the best of everything in a small speaker, the Type M has few serious rivals.

—Tom Nousaine

# **Take Five** Adcom GFA-6000 **Five-Channel Amplifier**

HE QUESTION "HOW SHOULD I power my multichannel home-theater system?" ranks up there with "Is there life after death?" and "Will Sam Donaldson spontaneously combust this Sunday?" It's just that there's so many power-delivery options. Adcom's GFA-6000 takes the five-channel approach, which for many buyers will make a lot of sense. That's because the layout of the 6000 (\$850) provides the left, center, right, and left/right surround power that's required for a Dolby Pro Logic hometheater system, and it delivers it all from a single box.

The 6000's power ratings are admirably solid: 100 watts each for the left, center, and right channels and 60 watts for each of its two surround outputs. These ratings are accompanied by rigorous provisions—power is said to hold up from 20 to 20,000 Hz with less than 0.09 percent THD into 8-ohm loads. (Most A/V receivers spec rear power only at a more forgiving 1,000 Hz.) This indicates that the 6000 should deliver cleaner power, and more of it, than even the best similarly rated receiver.

And this is a massive component. It's constructed of heavy-gauge sheet-metal all around, with deep heatsinking along each side; the amp tips the scales at over 31 pounds. You also get high-end circuitry, which may be superior to what you'll find in a receiver.

Inside, the 6000's five discrete-transistor outputs share a single large, multitapped toroidal transformer and a group of power-supply filter caps; the output transistors are distributed along the sides, and construction and quality are first-rate all around. Adcom's sturdy design carries over to the externals as well-this amp is nicely assembled and finished, with obvious care and good-quality materials.

None of the 6000's channels can be bridged to form higher-output channels, a feature offered by some competing multichannel (and many stereo) power amps. This limits your options regarding eventual upgrades or other system overhauls, but I didn't get all worked up about it, since I'm no great fan of bridging in general.

Like most amplifiers, the 6000 has a simple physical layout. Up front, the amp proffers a big, solid power switch with a central pilot LED. Ten more LEDs indicate the onset of distortion and when a channel's thermal-protection circuitry has engaged. The rear panel presents high-end-approved "five-way" binding-post outputs for all five chan-

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nels and five corresponding RCA-jack inputs. Each input is paired with an adjacent input-level trim screw. (The trims are normally left wide open; typically, you'd back them off only in those rare situations where your surround-sound source doesn't provide adequate level adjustment.) The back panel also provides a 10-pin jack that accepts a supplied "ADlink" cable, which you'd use for connecting all of the channels in one fell swoop if you also had one of Adcom's preamp/processor/tuners. (Things don't get much more convenient than that.)

Installing the 6000 is child's play: I simply connected my preamp/processor to the amp's inputs and ran speaker cables to two three-way tower main speakers, a full-range center speaker, and two dipole surround speakers, all of which have average sensitivity.

In action (after a 24-hour warmup period), the 6000 performed admirably. In its two-channel mode, the amp helped my towers produce sound with excellent definition, good low-end punch, and the slightly warm—yet crisp and transparent—sound I've come to associate with Adcom amps over the years. Ultimate power was clearly in the expected 100-watt region; though it

wasn't quite as dynamic and punchy over the last 1 to 2 dB of available loudness as the best two-channel "100-watt" amps I've experienced, it was acceptably close and very musical throughout. When the amp was overdriven, audible clipping came on gradually, and the sound remained largely clean up to the amp's limits.

The 6000 also delivered the goods when driving five-channel Pro Logic soundtracks. I really couldn't tell the difference, either qualitatively or quantitatively, between the Adcom and my usual setup, which includes three 100-watt-per stereo amps. The system sounded very coherent—all of the channels were well-matched, and neither mains, center, nor surrounds clipped much before their mates.

I also compared the 6000 to a highend A/V receiver I had on hand; it's rated to deliver 100 watts x 3 plus 50 x 2 (that's identical to the Adcom except for a rated 10-watt deficit for the surrounds). In this case, the 6000 clearly delivered more overall impact, clarity, and, particularly, low-end grunt in the upper reaches of the loudness scale. The difference wasn't dramatic, but it was genuine nonetheless.

The 6000 was virtually dead-quiet (even when I put an ear right up against one of my main's tweeters, with no input), and it was completely free of mechanical buzzing from its transformer. In fact, this amp was impressively quiet in every mode and proved altogether free of turn-on/off thumps or other rude noises, save a mild crackling as its power supply discharged after I'd shut it off.

Clearly, Adcom's GFA-6000 hits on all counts: It's well-conceived, well-executed, and a fine performer. It's not the least expensive multichannel amp you can buy, but there are plenty of more expensive models, too. As a middle-ground solution to home theater's power question, it strikes an admirable balance between generous high-quality power, serious performance, and a simple, elegant package. —Daniel Kumin

# Tape Crusader Sony SLV-940HF VHS VCR

et's GET IT OUT IN THE OPEN: AS long as we aren't talking about editing models, the major issue with most VCRs in or above the middle price range is convenience. Midpriced VCRs have no excuse for performing poorly; the circuitry that's required to produce great pictures and high-quality soundtracks made it down to these VCRs a long time ago. The whole ball of wax these days is how often a VCR makes us get up off the couch. Rest assured, the SLV-940HF—Sony's top-of-the-line VHS VCR—won't rouse you much from your well-deserved repose.

The SLV-940HF (\$549) simply crows convenience. This is the second generation of Sony VCRs to feature automatic clock setting, which is prompted by the Extended Data Services TV signal currently carried by many PBS affiliates. Other full-time comfort features include a cable mouse (for time-shifting shows via your cable box), VCR Plus+ programming, Hi-Fi sound, fourhead special effects, and a universal remote. You also get Sony's shuttle system on both the remote and the VCR itself; it plants play and stop buttons inside a variable-speed shuttle ring and, though there's no jog dial, an illuminated display enhances shuttle operation.

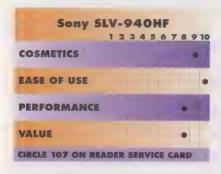
The 940HF's front panel is clean as a supermodel's complexion. The cassette slot is concealed behind a fold-down door, which contains buttons to control channel, quick-timer recording, edit mode, and tape speed (SP/EP recording, SP/LP/EP playback). Another hinged door offers more controls, including an EASY SET UP button that delivers on its promise. Press it and the VCR's onscreen display guides you along.

This VCR has more going for it, though. If merely watching prerecorded movies is all you want to do, in fact, there are plenty of lesser (and less expensive) VCRs that'll do the trick. What really makes the 940HF stand out



from the pack is its programming and editing capabilities. On the programming side, there's an eight-event, 1-month timer that's very easy to program and offers the ability to record from two different line-input signals as well as from the built-in tuner. This will be useful for recording from multiple sources, including an antenna, cable, and a satellite system.

Time-shifters should also appreciate the Adaptive Picture Control system, which automatically calibrates the VCR's recording circuitry whenever a blank tape is inserted. Lancelot Braithwaite, VIDEO's technical editor, says APC doesn't make recordings made with a top-grade tape look any better,



but it does improve performance with bargain-brand tape.

On the editing side, the 940HF offers a full complement of video-insert, audio-dub, and A/V-insert editing—all of which can be orchestrated from either the remote or the front panel. One notable omission, however, is a LANC (CONTROL-L) remote-control jack (for direct connection to an edit controller). A simpler Control-S remote-pause jack is included for basic synchro-editing between two VCRs.

Picture quality was very good at SP speed, with horizontal resolution topping out at 240 lines, weighted video S/N at 50.7 dB, chroma AM at 44.4 dB, and chroma PM at 45.5 dB. But it was merely good at EP speed (S/N measurements all dropped 3 to 4 dB); the EP falloff was especially apparent with off-the-air recordings. On the other hand, special-effects quality-with still frames, slow motion, and rapid search (7X with SP, 21X with EP)—was excellent. Audio frequency response rolled off rather dramatically at the high end of the spectrum; the resulting sound wasn't quite as crisp as what I'm used to, but it was hardly severe and was easily compensated for with my A/V receiver's tone controls.

Sony's SLV-940HF covers the performance bases with few shortcomings, and it's incredibly easy to use. You may want to look into reupholstering your couch—you could be spending a lot of time there.

—Cliff Roth

# JUTASSIC BOOM MTX PSW 101B Powered Bass Module

N A PERFECT WORLD-ONE IN which our living rooms were theatersized, and uttering the word "budget" would elicit an amusedly baffled "Huh?" from our butlers—we'd all get the low bass we need for our home-theater systems from a couple of 15-inch powered subwoofers that artisans recessed into our living room's floorboards. As the accountant for Waterworld can tell you, of course, we surely don't live in a perfect world. Some of us have small living rooms, or large living rooms that can't be cluttered with large wooden boxes. And some of us don't have a big chunk of change to drop on a couple of huge powered subwoofers. If any of this sounds familiar, know that there's no cause to give up hope-you can get some help for basschallenged main speakers. And MTX's PSW101B can show you the way.

The PSW101B (\$400) is a well-appointed powered bass module, which is our term for a speaker that produces nothing but low bass without producing the very lowest audible octave and a half or so. The ported cabinet, which measures 17.4 x 18.75 x 19 inches (h/w/d), employs a 12-inch woofer and an 80-watt power amplifier (rated, into 4 ohms). You can certainly find smaller bass modules for the money, but they

probably won't kick out as much bass as the 101B.

An active low-pass crossover lets you pick the frequency at which the woofer starts working. The 101B also includes speaker-terminal connections tied to a passive high-pass crossover, which cuts off the low frequencies produced by your main speakers. Other controls include a two-position phase switch and a level knob.

Test signals showed that the 101B belted out 105 dB SPL before distortion got troublesome, and it reached down to 43 Hz at full output. You can get a few more decibels and can go 10 or even 15 Hz lower with similarly sized powered subwoofers, but they all cost



\$200 to \$300 more than the 101B. And this module gets louder than several other modules costing \$100 more than it does.

Fire up some movies or music and MTX's PSW101B can't hide its rockand-roll roots. You really get some good shakes with the special effects in *Jurassic Park*, and the 101B does a great job with rock, R&B, electric country, and rap music. If you want to raise a ruckus and dollars are tight, the 101B delivers.

—Tom Nousaine



# APARTMENT 4-C JUST INSTALLED OUR NEW 1200 WATT HOME THEATER AMPLIFIER.



Our HCA–1206 is easily one of the most powerful THX\* certified home theater amplifiers in the world. It has an overwhelming 200 watts on each of 6 channels at 4 ohms, or 135 watts per channel at 8 ohms.

But we feel that such power is useless if it only makes your ears bleed. So we called on legendary circuit designer John Curl to bring high-end audio sophistication to home theater.

Plus, if you toggle a few input switches, you'll have the ideal multi-zone stereo amplifier. You can even switch it to a 5 or 4 channel amp, delivering over 350 watts per bridged channel. So please be careful with your HCA–1206. If not for your sake, then for the sake of your neighbors.





# widebody A

ioneer expands your rear-projection options with their Series-85 ProVision line, which resides one rung below the company's topnotch Elite line. The SD-P6085K (\$4,199) is a 60-inch widescreen ProVision set based on the manufacturer's Cinema Wide System, which has an aspect ratio of 16:10.7. Images are said to be brighter and sharper thanks to short-focus hybrid lenses, and the Intelligent System Control scheme uses a revamped remote and clever on-screen menus. Circle 110 on reader service card



## control central

cintosh's CR12 multizone A/V preamp (\$3,000) can simultaneously route a different A/V source to as many as four rooms or zones in your home. System control is eased by supplied room/zone sensors and a wireless remote control or by wall-mount keypads. As many as six CR12s can be daisy-chained for large-scale applications. And the distinctive glow of green lights will tell everyone in the room that a mighty McIntosh is running the show. Circle 112 on reader service card

# cut and paste

ro-style editing features—like flying erase heads for insert editing, audio dubbing, and random assemble editing with a sound monitor—highlight JVC's HR-VP628U Hi-Fi VCR (\$499). The VP628U uses Oval-Cut DA-4 video heads, said to eliminate ghosts and deliver noise-free special effects. Programming is aided by the VCR Plus+system and Cable Eye cable-box controller. Ultra Spec Drive is said to improve tape stability while cutting fast-forward and rewind times in half. Features include a front-panel jog/shuttle dial and audio input-level controls. Circle 109 on reader service card



# polk classic

ich sound and big bass from a slender tower was Polk's goal with their RT12 (\$799 a pair). The RT12 stands about 37 x 8.3 x 12.5 inches (h/w/d), is shielded so that it can be placed near a TV set, and utilizes PowerPort technology to help it deliver deep bass. Each cabinet features one 1-inch dome tweeter and two 6.5-inch woofers. Circle 111 on reader service card





# chip service A

nkyo's A-SV620 A/V integrated amplifier (\$650) employs a digital surround-sound chip developed by Motorola. The SV620 delivers 120 watts x 2 or 75 x 3 plus 25 x 2. Digitally derived Dolby Pro Logic and four other digital surround modes are on tap. Connections include three video and six audio inputs. The wireless Remote Interactive remote control is supplied. Circle 113 on reader service card



# ▲ guide cog

agnavox has built a StarSight decoder into its VRT762 four-head Hi-Fi VCR (\$499). Subscribe to StarSight's service and you can display comprehensive program guides on-screen. A full week's worth of programming information can be scanned at any one time, including detailed show descriptions, show titles with time remaining, and programs sorted by theme. Recording any program is a one-button affair via the supplied remote control, and a record list helps you keep track of your plans. Circle 114 on reader service card



# pack attack A

anton's Fonissimo 4 home-theater speaker package (\$1,295) is based on their Fonissimo subwoofer/satellite system. Starting with two satellites and a subwoofer (shown), the system adds a center speaker and second, identical pair of satellites. Each satellite, which stands 4.9 inches tall, employs a 4-inch midrange and a coaxially mounted I-inch tweeter; the sub has two 7-inch woofers. and the center speaker is a two-way bassreflex type. Circle 115 on reader service card



# **∢ table talk**

itsubishi's TS-5087 (\$3,899, shown atop an optional stand) offers big rear-projection images in a convenient tabletop format. The 50-inch set, which measures 25.25 inches deep and weighs 143 pounds, features three 7-inch CRTs and the 3D Y/C comb filter, which is said to be superior to other digital comb filters. Convenience features include dual-tuner PIP, the StarSight on-screen program guide, and the Viewpoint III operating system. Circle 116 on reader service card



received by August 21, 1995.

# GRAND PRIZE (1)

A trip on Northwest Airlines to the 1996 JVC Jazz Festival in London, Paris, Rome and The Netherlands and a 230 hp, Subaru SVX. The 8-day, 7-night trip for two includes airfare, hotel, VIP passes, an autographed Fender quitar, and more. Approx. retail val. \$41,000.





# FIRST PRIZE (4)

A JVC Home Theater including TV, VCR, complete Stereo System Approx. retail val.: \$3,379.



# SECOND PRIZE (30)

A JVC Mini Stereo System Approx. retail val.: \$580.



# THIRD PRIZE (50)

A JVC Portable Stereo System. Approx. retail val.:



# FOURTH PRIZE (1,000)

JVC Jazz Festival Commemorative T-shirt. Approx. retail val.: \$25.



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Stereo Review





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# **▼ voice box**

Itec Lansing fleshes out their Voice of the Theatre speaker line with the PSW21 powered bass module (\$299). The module features a 12-inch dual-voice-coil driver that's powered by a 100-watt (rated) amplifier. The PSW21 is said to be timbre-matched to the company's other Theatre-line speakers, for seamless surround performance. *Circle 117 on reader service card* 

# deep red ▶

uasar's SP3117 31-inch TV set (price not available at presstime) employs a SuperBlack picture tube, said to provide a deeper contrast setting against which colors and details are able to stand out clearly. The set also features improved color phosphors, said to result in purer reds and more natural greens. Features include two A/V inputs, one S-Video input, and single-tuner PIP. Circle 118 on reader service card





# mirror, mirror A

peakercraft places the mirror-imaged 1-inch soft-dome tweeter in their Model 6.5MIT in-wall speaker (\$465 a pair) off-axis of the 6.5-inch dual-voice-coil woofer to minimize diffraction and interference. The tweeter can also be aimed toward the listening area, overcoming less-than-ideal positioning. Circle 119 on reader service card

# uni-versal ▶

F pursues bottomoctave bass and accurate imaging with their Model Four tower speaker (\$5,000 a pair). Six drivers are utilized in each shielded four-way cabinet, including two 10-inch woofers, two 6-inch midbasses, and the Uni-Q coincident midrange/tweeter, which plants a 1-inch tweeter in the center of a 6-inch midrange. The Four, which stands 47.8 inches tall, uses the InterPort coupled-cavity vent to kick out low frequencies. Circle 120 on reader service card





JVC
"TRIPLE TRAY"
PORTABLE CD
CHANGER

# WHO SAYS CHANGE DOESN'T COME EASY?

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CD Changer as easy as changing your mind. Triple Tray's front loading operation gives you clear access to all your CDs. letting you replace up to 2 discs while one keeps playing. That means there's allways non-stop music ever when you stop to change CDs. Triple Tray makes the RC-XC1 the easiest fastest CD Changer you can find

Along with unmatched convenience, the RC-XC1 features  ${\bf a}$  1-Bit D/A Conventer that's an example of JVC digital audio technology at its finest. So change not only comes easy, it sounds better too

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V7ith Canon's exclusive 20x optical zoom, the ES 2000 not only brings you closer to the action, it brings you closer to perfection than any ordinary camcorder can. That's because our 20x zoom uses Canon's Optical Image Stabilization system to steady the image.

More effective than electronic stabilizing methods, Canon's Optical Image Stabilization counteracts shaking before the image passes through the lens. So there's never the loss of picture quality that you

experience with some electronic systems. And Optical Image Stabilization maintains image clarity throughout the entire zoom range.





Of course, the ES 2000 is a rock-steady choice for other reasons too. It's the first camcorder ever to feature Canon's exclusive new FlexiZone AF and FlexiZone AE systems—advanced new auto focus and auto exposure features that, with just a touch of a button, allow you to shift focus and exposure to any subject, anywhere in the frame.



The new ES 2000 with 20x Optical zoom, Optical Image Stabilization and color viewfinder

When you add to that the fact that the ES 2000 comes with a color viewfinder and records in the superior Hi8 format, you begin to realize that perfection is a whole lot closer than you think. For more information on any of our Hi8 camcorders, call 1-800-828-4040.





# CAM PACKED

The New Wave in Camcorders Boasts Performance and Value

IBS ARE CRISPING ON THE BARBIE, FRISBEES ARE flying, and everybody's heading to the beach—it's not a *Baywatch* rerun, so it must be summer. Traditionally, summer is when hot new camcorders make the scene, and this year is no different. Hoping to hunt down a camcorder that's just right for you? You'll find that new features and price reductions in all component categories make this a season to remember.

The feature trends are heady, and performance and convenience are on tap thanks to longer optical zooms, brighter color viewfinders, and other refinements in recording and stabilization. A few manufacturers are breaking the price barrier with tiny no-frills models—3x zoom and optical viewfinders are typical—that are extremely easy to use. Take GE's Images CG400 and Sanyo's VM-PS12 (both 8mm models) as well as JVC's EZ-1 VHS-C model, all of which may be discounted as low as \$400. Camcorders with a 10x or 12x zoom are expected to have a street price of \$599 or less this summer, while models with color viewfinders should be priced as low as \$699. Though most serious camcorder users are willing to pay for truly useful features, even loaded LCD-

screen and Hi8 camcorders are taking the price plunge.

the price plunge.

#### **8MM IS ENOUGH**

Leading the 8mm sortie is Sony, which is celebrating the 10th anniversary of their Handycam line. The company has significantly revamped their offerings in the ultra-compact TR (for "travel") size. And they've introduced a moderately featured Hi8 model, the CCD-TR100 (\$1,095), that offers 12X power zoom. But the hottest goods hail

from the Vision Series, a three-model lineup that boasts, in addition to a conventional black-and-white viewfinder, a side-mounted 3- or 4-inch color LCD screen that flips out for action. This year's Visionaries—the CCD-TRV30 (\$1,099; see "VideoTests," June 1995), CCD-TRV40 (\$1,299), and the Hi8 CCD-TRV70 (\$1,900; see page 64)—are said to be 20 percent smaller, more flexible, and less expensive than previous TR models. (Note that Nikon offers the VN-400, a CCD-TRV30 clone, for \$1,099.) The flip-out LCD is especially convenient—it rotates 270 degrees, flips the image when you've turned the screen 180 degrees, and nestles into the cam's body screen-side in, for protection and storage, or screen-side out, for viewing.

Seven Handycam models—including the two top Vision models as well as the CCD-TR83 (\$999) and CCD-TR600 (\$1,299)—grab images with a "hyper-precision" CCD imaging device that boasts 470,000 (gross) pixels. Sony says the upgraded CCD captures higher-resolution images as well as improves digital zooms and picture stabilization. SteadyShot optical image-stabilization circuits are said to eliminate the effects of shaky hands without the compromise in picture quality or the image cropping that occurs with some electronic stabilization systems.

Quick-cut shots familiar from MTV or NBC's Homicide are possible with every new Handycam, which feature a

recording mode that automatically limits shots to 5-second durations. And special-effects modes are proliferating, including funhouse-mirror modes that make subjects look skinnier or tubbier than they really are. Finally, a disappearing-button act makes Handycams seem less imposing: Membrane-style playback buttons glow orange when needed but disappear when you're recording.

Canon has a few slick Hi8 and 8mm tricks up their sleeve as well. The Flexi-



Zone AF/AE (for "auto focus/auto exposure") control system lets you smoothly shift focus from one person or object within a frame to another, all without moving your camera or altering the pictorial content one bit. First, you decide which area within the viewfinder's field should have optimized focus and/or exposure. Then you use an on-screen cursor, guided by an eight-way rocker control that's on the cam's back (within easy reach of your left thumb), to define this area for focusing; to optimize exposure, just tap a button above the rocker.

The FlexiZone rocker can be found on Canon's ES2000 Hi8 cam (\$1,600). It's a full-featured model that also benefits from the world's longest optical zoom—a staggering 20x power job. Pictures, even extra-tight shots, are kept steady thanks to the proprietary Optical Image Stabilization system. FlexiZone AF/AE can also be found on the ES-600 (\$899) and ES-550 (\$799) 8mm models; both offer 12x power zoom and what's billed as "the world's widest" wide-angle converter. The ES-600 also includes a color viewfinder.

Sharp addresses complaints of LCD washout in outdoor scenarios with six new 8mm Viewcam models, all of which feature a 1-percent reflectivity screen (previously available only on the top-of-the-line VLH-410U) that's said to glow brightly even in direct sunlight. The new models also boast improved picture quality, lighter chassis, and simplified controls (especially for adjusting playback volume); their priciest models offer digital 20X power zoom.

Best of all, Sharp's prices have dropped significantly across the board: For example, the VLH-420U (\$1,899), a 4-inch-LCD Hi8 model, costs much less than its predecessor, and the company's least expensive 3-inch-LCD cams, the VLE-33U (\$1,099) and VLE-37U (\$1,299), represent a \$100 savings over last year's models. The 37U is the one to watch, as it offers 16:9 framing, a two-speed zoom, and a "blockshot" option that automatically cuts and fades shots in 10-second intervals.

Finally, Sharp pushes the envelope with the VLH-450U (\$2,499), which comes with the Viewcam Teleport docking station. It facilitates a quick connection to your TV and AC power, and it automatically recharges the cam's lithium-ion battery. The coolest part, though, is that the Teleport transmits video stills across conventional phone lines to a similar Teleport station; the stills can be passed along by the 450U's imaging device or

by any tape the camcorder is playing.

The 8mm marching orders from Hitachi, Minolta, and Thomson attack the problem of user frustration. Their surveys indicate that battery drain is the number-one complaint voiced by camcorder owners—whenever they want to use their cam, the Ni-Cd battery is dead. New cams from these manufacturers run for 1 hour on six fresh AA batteries; improved super-alkaline batteries that deliver at least 80 minutes of recording are expected this summer.

Every new 8mm cam from these manufacturers also includes Instant Zoom, which digitally enlarges the picture by a factor of 1.5. Trigger it at the end of the lens' 12X optical-zoom range and you'll find yourself looking at an 18x closeup. Instant Zoom also ups these cams' digital zoom functions—so a digital 24X closeup can instantly become a 36X power enlargement. When their lenses are "pulled back," these cams deliver an unusually wide viewpoint—a 47.5-degree horizontal lens angle that's said to get more bodies or scenery into the picture. (Most 12x lenses achieve a 38- to 39-degree view in the wide-angle position.)

The trio's cams also offer 16-bit digital signal processing and high-performance amorphous heads. Top-of-the-line models—like the 8mm Hitachi VM-E510A (\$799), Minolta Master 8-862 (\$1433), and RCA PRO-942 (\$899) as well as the Hi8 Hitachi VM-H710A and RCA PRO-884HB (both \$1,099)—add a color viewfinder and electronic image stabilization. If you're heading from turf to the surf, Hitachi's VM-H81A Hi8 cam (\$2,099) is packed into an airtight "buoyancy-neutral" housing that's said to be impervious to moisture. Also separating this cam from the pack—and your TV is an optical signal sender that transmits video and audio (via IR) across the room to a supplied set-top receiver.

Samsung pushes the 8mm price envelope with the SCX-815 (\$699). It boasts a 12X zoom, a 113,000-pixel color view-finder, a high-speed shutter, three levels of colorization, and a four-mode auto-exposure function. It even has a manual focus ring—a rare find in this price range.

#### **COMPACT WITH AMERICA**

Price/performance comparisons make VHS-C camcorders a terrific value this summer. Take GE's CG505 (\$599) and its RCA cousin, the CC612 (\$699). Both deliver 12X variable-speed optical zoom, an auto-exposure dial with nine preset recording modes, eight preprogrammed titles plus a one-page titler, a 16:9 re-

cording mode, an auto head-cleaner, an auto date-titler, and a built-in lens cover. The GE CG515 (\$699) adds a 113,000-pixel color viewfinder.

RCA's CC616 (\$799) ups the ante with a built-in 4-watt light and a wireless remote. The company's CC620 (\$999) piles on electronic image stabilization, a 24x continuous zoom, 120x digital zoom, digital special effects (like strobe and "Classic Cinema"), and random assemble editing.

JVC, which builds VHS-C models for GE, Minolta, and RCA, offers random assemble editing on every one of its own models, starting with the GR-AX200U (\$800); you'll find this feature on Minolta's C-532 (\$957) as well. Several JVC and Minolta cams also feature Intelligent Function Controls, which group many key functions into a simple three-button array that's linked to an LCD readout.

Animation and time-lapse features mark JVC's GR-AX800U (\$1,000) and GR-AX900U (\$1,100). The Snapshot mode records digital stills (complete with a white border), while Motor Drive freezes the action in a series of still frames as a still-camera's hyperactive motor drive would. The AX900U also boasts a high-resolution color viewfinder that's said to boost its pixel count by 77 percent over previous models (to 113,000 and change, now industry-standard).

JVC's GR-SZ9 (\$1,900) is the only new Super VHS-C model we've spotted this season. It builds on the company's highly regarded predecessor (the GR-SZ7) with a high-resolution 570,000-pixel CCD image-sensor, extra-smart digital signal processing of focus, white balance, and exposure, 100X digital zoom with digital image stabilization, and a vast selection of fades and wipes—plus Hi-Fi stereo sound.

Zoomers will love the new VHS-C models from Panasonic and Magnavox, since they offer 14X optical-zoom lenses—an industry first for VHS-C models. Cams with 14X zooms include Panasonic's PV-IQ205 (\$699), which also has a large video head, a high-speed shutter, and factory-preset date/time (out of the box, all of Panasonic's new Palmcorders display East Coast time, but it's easily switched by time zone). Magnavox's CVT-620AV (\$700) includes most of the same features, though it lacks the automatic date/time function; their CVT-640AV (\$800) adds a color viewfinder and an eight-function wireless remote

Panasonic's PV-D705 Palmeorder XL

(\$1,109) is a four-head VHS-C cam with digital image stabilization, a high-resolution 470,000-pixel CCD imager, and pro-style DynAmorphous Metal heads for refined picture capture. Fun features include 10 preset titles, 10 colors of digital fade, still frame, strobe, and 16:9 recording mode. The energy-efficient D705 also squeezes 2 hours of recording out of its supplied Ni-Cd battery and has a self-diagnostics mode for troubleshooting problems.

## **FULL METAL JACKET**

Full-size VHS camcorders have fallen out of favor in much of the world, but America's romance with them endures. And full-size makers are rewarding our loyalty with generous price reductions. GE's CG886 (\$599) is an old-fashioned 8X optical-zoom model, while Samsung's SCF-765 (\$649) packs a 12X zoom, a 113,000-pixel color viewfinder, a 2-hour battery, a high-speed shutter, A/V dubbing, and a character generator/titler.

Panasonic brings its 14X power zoom lens to the full-size VHS arena in three new models that measure less than 3.5 inches wide: the PV-940 (\$699), PV-950 (\$799), which includes a 116,150-pixel



color viewfinder, and the top-of-the-line PV-960 (\$899), which zooms digitally from 14:1 to 20:1 and uses electronic image stabilization to smooth the transition. A center-mount handle and reversible viewfinder make all three models equally suited for right-handers and southpaws.

Hitachi's VM-3800 (\$799) luxuriates in a 100X digital Instant Zoom, a color viewfinder, a two-line/two-page titler, third-generation DSP, a universal remote,

16:9 recording, and a built-in light. Most of these features are also offered by the company's entry-level model, the VM-1800 (\$599).

Whatever you do, don't let the summer heat dull your senses. The shaky yen/dollar relationship is as likely to deteriorate further as it is to improve, so there's no time like the present to take advantage of these great camcorder bargains. Tell 'em David Hasselhoff sent you.

—Jonathan Takiff

PERFORMANCE PRODUCTS



Life's full of surprises. What shouldn't be a surprise is a dead battery just when you want to record that once-in-a-lifetime shot. That's why we created the Lenmar RediCell, the only camcorder battery designed to keep on charging until you need it. Since it's a NoMEM® battery, it won't build up a memory like nickel-cadmiums, so it can remain charging day after day and always deliver 100% at a moment's notice. Sort of like your adrenaline. Ask your Lenmar dealer for the new RediCell Battery. So you can be ready for whatever memorable event sneaks up on you next.

# standup gear >

merson's CG5703 video/photo tripod (\$80) offers a quick-release mount/dismount bracket to speed equipment setup, while the "camera-safe" locking platform holds your gear securely in place. There's also a fluid panhead (with bubble level) for smooth movement, a large easy-grip elevator crank, easy-adjust leg clamps, and adjustable outdoor feet. The CG5703's height is 59 inches when fully extended, 25.5 inches when retracted. Circle 121 on reader service card



# twist and shoot A

ony's TRV70 (\$1,900) combines Hi8 performance with a 4-inch "SwivelScreen" color LCD viewfinder/monitor, which rotates a full 270 degrees for multi-angle or self-recording; a traditional black-and-white viewfinder is also provided. Other features include a high-resolution 470,000-pixel CCD, Hi-Fi stereo sound, image stabilization with horizontal and vertical motion sensors, 24x digital zoom, and seven special-effects modes. Circle 122 on reader service card



anasonic's PV-S4580 S-VHS editing VCR (\$1,099) is packed with high-end features, including a digital time-base corrector (TBC) that reduces picture jitter. Assemble editing lets users define up to eight video segments, which are then transmitted via an IR signal to the recording VCR for automatic editing. A synchro-editing connector permits precise coordination with similarly equipped decks, and A/V dubbing accommodates add-on sound and/or video. Special video circuitry and DynAmorphous heads are said to significantly reduce picture noise. Circle 124 on reader service card

# tiny tube

ideographers seeking a cool field monitor should investigate Sharp's Model 4M-T30 LCD TV (\$599). The compact unit, which measures only 4.6 x 6.6 x 1.8 inches and weighs just 1.1 pounds without batteries, offers a 4-inch TFT active matrix color screen, full VHF/UHF channel reception, A/V input terminals, and a 1.1-inch speaker. An AC power adaptor is provided; a car adaptor, rechargeable battery pack, and sun shield are optional. Circle 123 on reader service card



# Excellence Redefined

IVC's GR-SZ9 represents the latest refinements in quality, creativity, and simplicity Like a ANDE AUTO bright F1.2 lens and Digital Signal Processing for stunningly clear highdefinition images—ideal for Super VHS high-resolution recording. A wider-than-ever selection of digital special effects that let you shoot professional style videos. And interactive in-viewfinder menus that make operation more user friendly than ever. The

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GR-SZ9u Super VHS STEREO

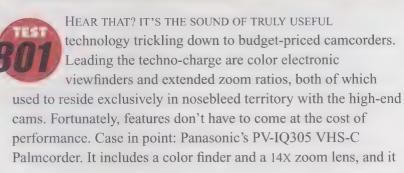
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JVC

# A VIDEOTEST

# Shot Class

Useful features and a nice price mark Panasonic's PV-IQ305



also offers an integral sliding lens cover, automatic time and date setting, a self-diagnostics mode, and lots of other practical conveniences. And picture quality is very good for a cam in this price range.

Given its price (\$799), the IQ305's feature package really is remarkable; though its ticket is only slightly higher than that of truly bare-bones models, it delivers much more than they do. In addition to point-and-shoot simplicity and automated operations, there are some unexpected manual controls, like those for shutter and focus. And the contrast-type TTL auto focus is quite fast, taking little time to get where it wants to go; minimum

auto-focus distance is 0.5 inch and 34 inches for wide-angle and telephoto, respectively.

Purists aren't crazy about color viewfinders, of course. Color models have lower resolution than their black-and-white counterparts, and some find that this makes manual focusing more difficult. And though that can be true with some cams, I didn't have any problems here; discerning fine focus in both the automatic and manual-focus modes was simple. As focus mechanisms improve (and the IQ305 proves that it's happening), arguments against color LCDs will be hard to justify. In any case, color finders are here to stay.

From where I sit, that's good news: It's just more fun to shoot when a color finder is onboard.

The IQ305's finder displays zoom ratio, battery and tape-remaining indicators, transport mode, record- and shutter-speed indicators, a 10-second reminder, VCR mode, as well as time and date. This information can also be monitored on-screen when the cam is connected to a TV. The clock/calendar is preset at the factory for Eastern Standard Time, which is a nice amenity right out of the box; jumping to another time zone is easily done via the finder's menu. The cam even automatically adjusts for Daylight Savings Time twice a year.

Measuring 4.6 x 4.2 x 6.8 inches (h/w/d) and weighing 1.9 pounds, the 305 is comfortable to hold and easy to operate. The finder is housed in a stalk; it offers both diopter-focus and brightness controls. The stalk folds back against the camcorder body, providing access to the IQ305's playback controls, which are laid out on the stalk's underside in an oval pattern that's compact but easy to navi-

BY STEWART APPLEGATH

gate. The still-function button, which freezes images on playback, is located just above the VTR buttons.

Though unorthodox, Panasonic's positioning of the playback controls works. After all, you can't use a camcorder for recording and playback simultaneously. It's true that most manufacturers locate these buttons on the main body of their cams, but I found the IQ305's VTR setup (carried over from last year's line) to be very easy to use; in fact, it often reminded me of using a remote control.

The other main camera controls run along the 305's spine. The centrally positioned fader, high-speed-shutter, and backlight buttons are easy to find and use without hunting while you're shooting. The fade control (to or from black) is triggered by the main standby/record button: If you push the fader button while shooting, audio and video will fade out the next time you push the trigger button to stop recording; if you push the fader button when you aren't shooting, they'll fade in the next time you start recording. The fully automatic shutter is defeated by pressing the high-speed-shutter button; speeds range from one-sixtieth of a second (normal) all the way up to a bodacious one-ten-thousandth of a second. The backlight button simply makes shooting easier: Once pushed, it stays engaged until you defeat it.

The manual-focus thumbwheel and automatic-focus-override button are conveniently located on the front of the cam, just below the lens; their location means that roving fingers won't accidentally find their way into your shots,

which can happen with lens-ring focus mechanisms. The main VTR/cameramode power switch is located close by, which means that it's out of harm's way during shooting. When you shift the power switch to CAMERA, the shutter-type lens cover snaps out of sight. As on the last few generations of Palmcorders, the IQ305's wireless remote

# The four-speed power zoom is hip, increasing flexibility in a variety of situations.

control is hidden in a slot in the cam's side; this smart touch makes it easy to keep track of this relatively tiny accessory. A "hot shoe" designed to secure and power an accessory light can be found above the lens.

The 14X zoom magnification (5.3 to 74.2 mm) is one of the highest ratios I've seen (except for units that feature digital zoom enhancement). The IQ305 also features a great four-speed power zoom that increases shooting flexibility in a variety of situations. Many manufacturers simplify this feature down to a two-speed mechanism, which often leaves me wanting more choices-"too fast" or "too slow" just aren't good options. The extra gradations offered by the IQ305 are very welcome amenities.

If I could wish two features onto the

IQ305, it'd have RCA input and output jacks instead of a single A/V output (which requires an adaptor cable); I'd use them to record material from other sources, especially now that VHS-C tapes come in 40-minute cassettes that run up to 2 hours (movie-length) in the SLP mode. I'd also add a user-defeatable counter/readout for both the record and playback modes; the IQ305 offers only a 10-second-interval reminder for the record mode, and the dual-mode readout would make it easier to track what you've shot. In fairness, these are minor flaws in an otherwise thoughtful and logical package.

The IQ305's 0.25-inch CCD recorded good-quality pictures at both the SP and SLP speeds; color accuracy was good, if slightly undersaturated. I did notice some some color bleeding as well as some luminance noise. Recorded picture resolution measured 240 lines, which is good for the format. Minimum illumination measured 1.6 lux for 50 IRE.

#### BY THE NUMBERS

Measurements by Berger-Braithwaite Labs

Horizontal resolution: camera, 320 lines; viewfinder, 270 lines; recorder, 240 lines Picture S/N (SP): unweighted video, 43.1 dB; weighted video, 46.2 dB; chroma AM, 43.8 dB; chroma PM, 43 dB Picture S/N (SLP): unweighted video, 38.2 dB; weighted video, 45.7 dB; chroma AM, 43.3 dB; chroma PM, 42.5 dB

Linear mono sound is on tap. The cam's audio performance was slightly below average, due to the quality of the built-in mono electret-condenser microphone; it also picked up some tapetransport noise. There are no jacks for an external microphone or headphones, though their absence isn't unusual given the cam's price.

INEXPENSIVE CAMCORDERS HAVE COME a long way, as Panasonic's PV-IQ305 ably proves. It feels comfortable when you heft it, and it's simple to use. And it has truly desirable high-end features like a color viewfinder and 14X zoom—unimaginable perks at this price only a year ago. Though its audio capabilities could stand some improvement, that's a small tradeoff considering the alternatives. The IQ305 is a fine performer and a very good value.

# THE SHORT FORM

#### **PANASONIC PV-IQ305**

Component type: VHS-C camcorder Price: \$799 Target: Convenience-minded camcorder users

#### **KEY FEATURES**

■ Color viewfinder ■ 14X zoom ■ Four zoom speeds ■ Manual focus and shutter-speed options Shutter speed can be set to one-ten-thousandth of a second Automatic calendar/time readout Wireless remote control

#### SUMMARY

■ Feature package is remarkable for the price ■ The zoom has one of the highest ratios I've seen 
Offers good picture quality 
Audio performance is slightly below average A very good value

Circle 125 on reader service card

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CIRCLE NO 64 ON READER SERVICE GARD

# 50 5

## Gump Happens, Judy Rides Again, Bare Witness

#### **FORREST GUMP**

Since FORREST GUMP IS A CERTIFIED phenomenon (it's already surpassed Star Wars to become the third-highestgrossing film of all time), let's not fret over "What It Says About Us" and get right to the chocolate, er, heart of the matter. The 142-minute Oscar-winning Gump (Paramount; VHS, \$23, CLV discs, \$50; Philips Video CD, \$30) boasts a widescreen transfer of about 2.1:1, and though it's done up to THX standards (the image is quite good, if not exceptional), it displays a tendency toward soft colors. Gump isn't much of a surround-sound showcase, either, since the intimacy of the storyline dictates that most of the dialogue, musical score, and ambient sounds must be positioned front and center.

Included with the laserdisc and Video CD editions is a 37-minute making-of program entitled Through the Eyes of Forrest Gump (the VHS version is sold separately for \$10), a pleasant behindthe-scenes tour

> that reveals some of the computerized trickery used to show good ol' Forrest (Tom Hanks-as if you didn't know) shaking hands

with JFK or sitting next to John Lennon on Dick Cavett's talk show. Oddly, Through the Eyes contains 14 chapter stops, while the film itself has none. Oh well-deluxe is as deluxe —Andy Wickstrom usual punch. Other movies may have upped the action ante since The Terminator's debut (Die Hard and Speed spring to mind), but, in a sense, they're all imitators. This is the original, and it's never looked better.



The long arm of the outlaw: Schwarzenegger makes a point in The Terminator

#### THE TERMINATOR

ERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY (1991) deserves all of the praise it continually gets, but the THX-approved widescreen reissue of its forebear, The Terminator (Hemdale/Image; CLV disc, \$40), is a wonderful reminder of how much A-level excitement director James Cameron generated on a B-picture budget. The thrills in the original Terminator (1984) were compounded by their unexpected nature-remember, neither Arnold Schwarzenegger nor Cameron could claim superstar stature at the time of the film's release. The images of this 1.85:1 transfer are sharp enough that each subsequent viewing unearths new information; only here, for instance, is it indisputably clear that Arnold is, er, fully on view in Chapter 4's opening scene. Fortunately, it's the nonstop action scenes that linger most in memory, whether it's Arnie's quick-fisted disposal of a trio of punks upon his arrival, the superbly staged shootout at the police station ("I'll be back"), or the breakneck motorcycle, police-cruiser, and tractor-trailer chases. Even the digital mono soundtrack packs an un-

#### PETER GABRIEL **Secret World Live**

PETER GABRIEL, THE ONE TRUE KING of All Media, has finally put the finishing touches on the video companion to last year's double-CD release, Secret World Live, Filmed over two nights in November 1993 at Modena. Italy's Palasport arena, the full-screen Secret World Live (Geffen/Image; VHS, \$30, CLV disc, \$40) is dominated by grainy cinematography and muddled sound (more often than not, guitarist David Rhodes is absolutely lost in the stereo mix). Curiously, much of the footage shot during the dramatically percussive "Digging in the Dirt"culled from a mini-camera mounted on a makeshift helmet that distorts Gabriel's face enough to make him resemble Spinal Tap's hirsute bassist, Derek Smalls—are the sharpest images of the entire 102-minute show. And while there's no doubting the sincerity or ace musicianship of Gabriel's crack band (which includes bassist Tony Levin, drummer Manu Katche, and vocalist/foil Paula Cole), the dirty little secret of Secret World Live appears to be that much of what you're hearing isn't all that live. Buried in the credits is this telling line: "Additional engi-

Hot chocolates: Hanks in Gump

## SOFT WIRE SOFT WIRE SOFT WIRE SOFT WIRE

neering at Real World Studios, Box, UK, and Guillaume Tell Studios, Paris." (The liner notes for the CD word things a tad more succinctly, adding the phrase, "additional recording and production at. . . . ") Most of this post-production tinkering seems to have been applied to the vocals; the maneuvering is readily apparent in songs like "Across the River" and "Don't Give Up," where Gabriel dramatically alters his physical proximity to the microphone with no detectable shifts in the level or ambience of his voice. That's not to say Secret World is a bad performance—the band is lively and animated, and director François Girard's lens captures all of the performers' intensity. But sometimes, Live just isn't quite the same as being there.

-Mike Mettler

## JUDY GARLAND The Golden Years at MGM

PROCLAIMING "JUDY! JUDY!" would be understating things, for this garland to Ms. Garland is much more than a sum of its parts. If the three movies included in this lavish box set—The Harvey Girls (1946), The Pirate (1948), and Summer Stock (1950)—weren't such genuine classics, they'd almost get upstaged by the rich-



Drivin' rhythm: Judy in Summer Stock

es of rare Judy material included here—short takes from her entire career (starting at age 7), a stellar collection of stills, trailers from nearly all of her 30-odd films, audio commentary from *Harvey Girls* director George Sidney, radio appearances, an analog track containing 80 songs previously cut, truncated, or passed over for alternate takes, and rehearsals, complete with



Treading lotto: Blankman's Wayans

gaffes and some telling coaching that reveals how Judy's special magic came into being.

The film portions of Judy Garland: The Golden Years at MGM (MGM/UA; CLV/CAV discs, \$125) look absolutely gorgeous. This is especially true of The Pirate, which accents director Vincente Minnelli's exotic use of color in lighting, sets, and costumes, greatly intensifying the mood of scenes like the fiery "Pirate Ballet" (Side 4, Chapter 6). It also lets us dwell on details, such as the stylized sets showcased during Judy's unforgettable rendition of "Get Happy" in Charles Walters' Summer Stock (Side 6, Chapter 35). All three full-screen (not letterboxed) films have been digitally transferred from interpositives created from the original nitrate Technicolor negatives.

It's a shame to note that the audio track for *The Pirate* was often marred by a harsh, scraping, practically vibrating tone. At first I suspected a problem with my reference system, but subsequent viewings using another otherwise identical disc on another system *and* a third set sent to VIDEO by MGM/UA—who felt our initial copy's defect was an isolated incident—proved otherwise. MGM/UA commented that a great deal of work had gone into improving the sound of the previous, separate laser-

disc release of *The Pirate*, which had as much noise as audio. In any case, this is still a laserdisc worth having, and the general excellence of the other two films (along with all of those extras) leaves me longing for further digitally rescued MGM gems.

—Josef Krebs

#### BLANKMAN

T'S A LOW-DOWN DIRTY SHAME THAT Blankman (Columbia TriStar; VHS, priced for rental, CLV disc, \$35) didn't score at the box office. While not exactly inhabiting Ernst Lubitsch territory, this genial tale of an inept, nerdy inner-city crimefighter (Damon Wayans) and his embarrassed TV-cameraman buddy (David Alan Grier) plays much like an urban Martin-and-Lewis movie. Sadly, the TriStar transfer and the pressing (at Sony's Austrian plant), while presented in the proper 1.85:1 aspect ratio, is often dark and gritty, with colors dominated by an unappealing orange tinge. The standout soundtrack, however, is another Dolby triumph, with neat surround and boombox reverberations courtesy of Prince, Silk, Domino, and a host of others.

—Mel Neuhaus

#### **PRINCESS CARABOO**

MAGINE IF PRESTON STURGES DI-rected an episode of PBS' Masterpiece Theatre and Princess Caraboo (Columbia TriStar; VHS, priced for rental, CLV disc, \$35) starts to make perfect sense, Caraboo (Phoebe Cates) is a hilarious cinematic cocktail: a waifish-19th century enigma who, without uttering a word of English, manages to convince the local British hoi polloi that she is in fact an expatriate Middle Eastern princess. Based on a true story (!), this sparkling '94 boxoffice sleeper features a marvelous ensemble cast, including Kevin Kline (Cates' real-life husband), Stephen Rea, Jim Broadbent, Wendy Hughes, and the seemingly ever-present John Lithgow. Wittily directed and co-written by Michael Austin, Caraboo benefits from a grand period production and beautifully muted imagery courtesy of master cinematographer Freddie Francis. The TriStar transfer and Sony pressing (in the correct European 1.66:1 aspect ratio) reproduces the in-



## WIRE SOFT WIRE SOF



The princess lied: Caraboo's Cates dances her way into royalty

tentions of the filmmakers with immaculate detail; ditto the Dolby soundtrack, which is made prominent by a lively Richard Hartley score and a number of nifty surround effects. Add it all up and this Princess turns out to be quite the little gem.

#### THE INVISIBLE COLLECTION

THEN UNIVERSAL FIRST UNVEILED The Invisible Man (1933), their interpretation of H.G. Wells' classic tale of an experiment gone awry, it captivated audiences with a witty script, James Whale's eccentric direction, and a bravura debut performance from Claude Rains. Most of all, The Invisible Man defied reality via its landmark cinemagical effects. Then, in 1940, the first of a number of sequels was released, and show biz's greatest vanishing act was off and running. Now MCA/Universal has produced the fourtitle The Invisible Collection (CLV discs, \$100).

The high-caliber LDC pressings, transferred from nicely preserved 35MM negatives and fine grains, provides over 5 hours of fun for fantasy-film fans. You get Vincent Price in The Invisible Man Returns (1940), John Barrymore and Virginia Bruce in The Invisible Woman (1941), the WWII-driven Invisible Agent (1942), and Jon Hall and John Carradine in The Invisible Man's Revenge (1944) as well as theatrical trailers, chapter stops, and extensive illustrated liner notes. The crisp, clear black-and-white of old-time Hollywood will win approval of laserphiles, and the strong digital mono soundtrack does justice to Hans Salter's lilting scores. For the record, MCA still offers the initial 1933 classic on disc (\$35), as well as the final outing, Abbott and Costello Meet the Invisible Man (1951), as part of the Abbott and Costello Meet the Monsters box (\$100).

#### MRS. DOUBTFIRE The Collector's Edition

IKE JIM CARREY'S THE MASK, 1993's mega-box-office smash Mrs. Doubtfire exists mainly to showcase the comedic talents of its beloved star. In this case it's the ever-manic Robin Williams, who transforms himself into a 65-year-old British housekeeper as if he were born to play the role. But a box set this elaborate begs the question: Does Mrs. Doubtfire deserve the kind of ultra-enhanced treatment usually reserved for the Citizen Kanes of the world? No matter where you stand on this issue, there's no denying that the deluxe Doubtfire (FoxVideo; CLV/CAV discs, \$100) is a terrific package, packed with everything a fan could possibly want: trailers and promotional materials, a running commentary from director Chris Columbus, a complete version of the original Chuck Jones cartoon that opens the film, a whopping 30-minutes worth of deleted (and—no surprise-mostly improvised) scenes, and much more. And the Panavision 2.35:1, THX-approved transfer puts a welcome spotlight on the film's beautiful San Francisco locations. For Williams' legions of devoted fans, the line forms to the left. -Ken Korman



Table turner: Doubtfire's Williams

#### ONE-EYED JACKS

HIS CLASSIC WESTERN REVENGE odyssey is also a notorious odyssey of endurance. When filming commenced in 1958, One-Eyed Jacks (Paramount; CLV disc, \$40) was plagued by flareups between star/producer Marlon Brando and director Stanley Kubrick, who soon flew the coop. Brando then picked up the directorial reins himself-and turned in a nearly 5-hour cut almost 3 years later. Paramount's executives must have blinked—and then they virtually halved the footage and released their



Cell mating: Jacks' Brando behind bars

own cut in 1961. It garnered good reviews and did decent business, but nowhere near enough to recoup its enormous costs. Still, Paramount's cut of this fascinating, studied drama, of an outlaw hunting down the ex-friend who left him to die, has attained revered status due to Brando's unorthodox interpretation of the material, the unusual Malibu coastal locations (shrewdly recalled by Clint Eastwood in 1973's High Plains Drifter), and Charles Lang's gorgeous Technicolor photography. Jacks was also Paramount's last production using the brilliant VistaVision process (which employed a variable ratio that ranged from 1.66:1 to 2:1). This razor-sharp LDC pressing is in the original theatrical 1.85:1 aspect ratio (preferred by Paramount as the exhibition choice for

## SOFT VVIRESOFT V

playhouses not equipped for Vista-Vision)—a reasonable decision, as I doubt that the picture ever played on more than a handful of screens in pre-IMAX-era 1.66:1 dimensions. An enormous improvement over the previous, grainy full-framed disc version, the new Jacks also delivers a lush digital mono soundtrack that beautifully amplifies Hugo Friedhofer's thundering score. -MN

#### TIME BANDITS

ERRY GILLIAM, THE EX-MONTY Pythonite, has made a second career out of directing wild cinematic romps, and Time Bandits (Paramount; CLV disc, \$40) is the film that set him on his course. The story of a band of dwarves that leads an unsuspecting youth through a series of "holes" in the space/ time continuum, Bandits (1981) is visually stunning in the manner of Gilliam's later creations, such as Brazil (1985) and The Fisher King (1991), but it's not nearly as satisfying. Jokes fly in every direction, but the timing is off more often than not, and the storyline's relentless pace could leave some viewers gasping for air. Still, the troupe runs into confrontations with wonderful support players like John Cleese (Robin Hood) and Sean Connery (King Agamemnon), and the excellent 1.85:1 letterboxed transfer finely preserves Gilliam's trademark panoramic visuals. "Holes" aside, it's well worth your Time. -KK



Glass menagerie: Witness's Ford, McGillis keep it on ice

#### WITNESS

HE SUPERB BALANCE OF WITNESS (1981), both in a moral and a compositional sense, is easy to appreciate in its recently remastered widescreen version (Paramount; CLV disc, \$40). Director Peter Weir wastes nary a shot or an inch of frame in this story of a Philadelphia detective (Harrison Ford) who uncovers departmental corruption and must hide out, while wounded, in the farmhouse of an Amish widow (Kelly McGillis) and her son (Lukas Haas) . . . who also happens to be a murder witness. Ford has never been more charming than as the gruff city cop who learns about a different way of life. His falling in love with widow

McGillis is delightfully protracted, culminating in a grand scene that's centered around a flurry of intense kisses and immediately followed by the arrival of the bad guys. Outdoor scenes in this clear 1.85:1 transfer are sharp and bright, while the moody nighttime interiors-remember, the Amish shun electricity—have a rich darkness with just II bit of unavoidable grain. Witness is the kind of movie where every glance speaks volumes. And the scene in which a barn's wooden frame is raised against a perfectly blue sky (Chapter 11) is a validation that honesty, industry—and life—can indeed be sweet.

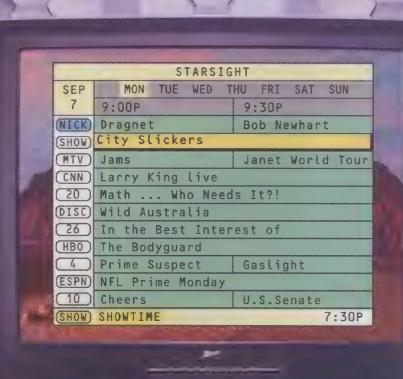
#### SILKWOOD

AREN SILKWOOD ISN'T EXACTLY your typical big-screen heroine. A spirited and carefree twentysomething from Oklahoma, Silkwood found herself unexpectedly embroiled in an investigation of unsafe working conditions at the nuclear facility where she was employed in the mid-'70s—and her curiosity may very well have cost her her life. Thanks to Meryl Streep's brilliant portrayal, Silkwood was given the chance to transcend the headlines and be seen as a real if flawed human being. Though a bit on the somber side, Silkwood (1983, Summa Video; CLV/ CAV discs, \$50) manages to capture the era and the rural-America setting quite beautifully. (Silkwood also represents the bridge between director Mike



CONTINUED ON PAGE 86

# To See The Future Now, Watch Us. Zenith Advanced Video Imaging With StarSight."



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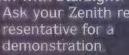
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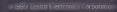
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# JEMEDIA.



TECHNOLOGY

#### PC NO EVIL

Video Quality and Multimedia Applications

F YOU OWN EVEN A RUDIMENTARY home-theater system, you can't help but feel that the video quality you get out of your MPC is a joke. When the subject of PC video is raised in polite conversation, it conjures up visions of tiny talking heads, their mouths flapping as rigidly as that of a character in an early Hanna-Barbera cartoon. Examine the video clips delivered by even a killer MPC and you can't help but frown at the dull images and jerky

The problems with PC video are legion: Video poses serious problems for home PC hardware. And the big content providers, constrained by the need to be compatible with older hardware, offer software with poorly compressed, low-resolution clips—240 x 160 pixels and 15 frames per second are typical. Nonetheless, even these simple clips can bring a 2-year-old 486 processor to its knees.

It doesn't have to be this way, of course. There are far more PCs than there are Macintoshes and "workstations" combined, so there's a powerful profit motive for bringing advanced video capabilities to the PC. And R&D really isn't the problem, either-product cycles are blindingly fast, averaging 3 to 6 months. The PC you bought last January can be two generations out of date by the end of the year.

In fact, new operating systems—including the eagerly anticipated Windows 95 and the next version of Windows NT (currently dubbed "Cairo"), both of which are expected to offer "Plug and Play" simplicity-promise to ease the considerable headaches that among custom multimedia systems. Integrated support for video and 3-D animation will combine with these operat-



ing systems to help ensure that clips recorded on one MPC package will automatically play at a resolution/framerate combination that another package

Today's PCs still have a way to go, though. Video applications require a large number of floating-point operations that need to be carried out in realtime; this poses a bigger problem for PCs than for workstations and Power Macs. Without an assist from a dedicated video acceleration chip, full-motion full-screen video playback-which requires on-the-fly decompression, scaling, interpolation, and color space conversion—bogs down even the fastest of Intel's current Pentium processors.

But don't despair. The popularity of the PC is, after all, based on its upgradability, which has been fostered by an incredibly hyperactive conglomeration of aftermarket suppliers. With some careful planning, you can turn your PC into a topnotch video system—but it won't come cheap. Getting high-quality images (and sound) costs no less here than when setting up a topnotch hometheater system. And know from the

start that MPEG-1 performance is the best you can achieve without a truly huge investment.

Begin with a fast processor and as much memory as you can afford. These days, 100-MHz Pentium processors (P100s) form the core of nearly every company's product line. If you want the best video you can get out of your PC, get a P100.



Most pundits recommend 16 MB of RAM as the minimum for general-purpose use, and they're right on target—if all you need to do is play back video clips. But if you want to record ("capture") and/or edit video in real-time, you really need 32, 64, or even 128 MB of system RAM. High-quality motion video positively guzzles memory.

Video-capture software often helps out on the memory front, though. Most programs give you the option of capturing video directly to your PC's hard drive or using system RAM as a dedicated capture buffer. If you have RAM to burn, go with the latter option, since system RAM is typically 100 times faster than your hard drive, giving your system a huge edge in manipulating video streams.

In any case, your PC should have local-bus peripheral support in order to keep up with video demands. Nearly every Pentium sold today includes Intel's PCI version of the local bus, so this won't be a problem if you're heading out to buy a P100. But it will be a problem if you have an older PC that doesn't have a PCI or VL-bus: Bus architecture can't be upgraded unless you're ready to get drastic and replace your PC's motherboard.

Next up is the hard drive itself. Faster and bigger is better, of course, but it also pays to invest in an A/V drive, which attacks a common hard-drive problem: Hard discs literally heat up as they work to keep their tracks in line, so occasionally they perform a "thermal recalibration" on themselves to right things. Recalibration doesn't effect simple applications like loading a spreadsheet or retouching a static image, but, as I/O functions are suspended for a few hundred milliseconds during recalibration, it can cause dropped frames when you're capturing a video clip or cause buffer under-runs when you're writing to a CD-recorder. The A/V type uses advanced techniques to avoid errors due to recalibration. Topranked drives include IBM's Ultrastar AV (about \$2,325), a 5.1-GB SCSI-II drive, and Micropolis' Model 3243AV (\$2,200), a 4.3-GB SCSI-II model.

And then there's the video card. Most PC-oriented content providers stick to proprietary compression algorithms—such as Intel's Indeo, Supermac's Cinepak, and Mac/PC cross-platform schemes like Apple's QuickTime—since they're generally more tolerant of the floating-point inadequacies of base-level PCs (and Macs).

But they're nearly useless for broadcast-quality work. For that, you need MPEG compression, which is still relatively rare in the PC realm. This gap is rapidly being filled, but to produce topquality clips in real-time, your options are still fairly limited; Sigma Designs' Reel-Magic Producer (\$3,995) is the best budget choice for encoding MPEG-I streams on the fly. Currently, MPEG-2 encoders are prohibitively expensive for all but major commercial enterprises (as if the Sigma card isn't expensive enough), though work by major chip vendors like C-Cube will change this situation, possibly by year's end. Home-theater aficionados don't think much of MPEG-1, of course, but MPEG-1 quality can actually be quite good in a PC context, and it's finally beginning to make an impact in the PC arena. Baselevel graphics cards like Diamond Multimedia's Stealth64 Pro Video (\$399) and Videologic's Graphics Star 700 (\$349) can be purchased with dedicated MPEG-playback accelerator chips or upgraded via a daughtercard at a later date. Other graphics accelerators can be configured to work with standalone MPEG playback cards.

After capturing, editing, and mixing your video, you need to save it in a form that others can access. Though Sony/Philips and Toshiba/Time Warner are working on competing high-density DVD formats, today's benchmark is the good old CD. For \$2,000 to \$5,000. you can purchase a CD-recorder that'll record video and audio; the resulting CD-R discs can be played on any computer that's equipped with a CD-ROM player (or on a CD-i player). Yamaha's quad-speed CDR-100 (\$4,995) is the current state-of-the-art, but doublespeed CD-R decks from Pinnacle Micro, Creative Labs, and others can be found for under \$2,000. Another option is to have a service bureau record your video onto a \$20 CD-ROM disc, for about \$90.

All of which brings us back to product cycles. As you can see, you need to get a loaded P100, and then spend several thousand dollars more on cards and a CD-R deck, if you want state-of-theart video on your home PC today—and even then it'll only be MPEG-1 quality. In the next few years, however, MPEG-2 cards will become relatively affordable and higher-density storage will be available. They may not enable you to brew up your own *Jurassic Park*, but you won't be stuck with Deputy Dawg, either





#### **NEW TECH**

1 PACKARD BELL is putting a new spin on applications flexibility by loading its new 486, P75, and P100 MPCs (including the P75 minitower shown here, \$2,299 to \$2,399, depending on options; circle 126 on reader service card) with two CD-ROM players. Potential uses include running an application from one disc while downloading graphics from another as well as listening to a music CD while playing a game. The new PCs also offer a variety of enhancements compared to prior models: All of the systems now boast 8 MB of RAM, a 14.4-Kbps fax/modem (with phone-answering functions), and SRS 3-D sound. 2 YAMAHA gets big bass out of its small YST-SS510 multimedia speaker package (\$299; circle 127 on ing in Active Servo technology. The YST-M5 satellites, which measure 7.33 x 3.25 x 4.85 inches (h/w/d), incorporate a 3-watt-per-channel (rated) amplifier and are said to reproduce frequencies down to 90 Hz through their 2.5-inch full-range drivers. The YST-MSW10 bass modand a 25-watt (rated) amp in its 8 x 11 x 9.8-inch cabinet Hz. Features include magnetadaptor. S NAPA VALLEY **BOX** promotes convenience with its Rocket 2 multimedia storage unit (\$70; circle 128

Rocket 2 is actually two stacked Rocket 1 modules: stacking enables the Rocket system to grow with your media collection without requiring additional floor space. Each Rocket 1 (\$40) measures 19.5 x 30.5 x 7.9 inches (h/w/d) and holds up to 56 videotapes or 140 CDs and/or CD-ROMs on multi-angle shelves that can be set flat, flat with a vertical back, or in a V-shape; the Rocket 2's capacity is twice that of the Rocket 1. Most importantly, perhaps, Rocket modules are environmentally correct: NVB says the linseedoil-finished Radiata Pine they use comes from strictly managed plantations where a sapling is planted for each tree cut down. 4 TURTLE BEACH's Tropez sound card (\$249; circle 129 on reader service card) is a do-it-all device. The Tropez is said to offer highquality 16-bit digital audio, professional-caliber MIDI wave-table synthesis (with 128 stored instruments), and 100-percent game compatibility. The package is loaded with software, including Sierra (a multimedia audio controller for music CDs that can be run on top of the menu bar of any application), the Turtle Beach Mixer, WaveSE sound-editing software, MousePlayer instrument-audition software, a Turtle Beach MicroWave OLEand Stratos songwriting software. There's also a Wave-Patch patch editor that lets ments include a 386SX microprocessor or better, 2 MB of









## einenegmet eikemitlehi tehe ni deekeivet

#### Wherever You ROM Sony PRD-150 Portable CD-ROM Player

HOSE READERS JUST RETURNING from the sled races in Antarctica will be surprised to learn that sales of CD-ROM players have exploded. And demand is not limited to home computers: Road warriors may forget to pack a comb or toothbrush, but they don't seem to be leaving home without their laptop. This means that the next big frontier in CD-ROM players is portable external models that plug into laptops.

Sony's PRD-150 portable CD-ROM Discman (\$500) is just such a player. Recall that Sony developed the first portable CD audio player and you'll understand why the company's engineers weren't shy about modifying the Discman concept for CD-ROM playback. In fact, the 150 looks a lot like a CD portable and it plays music CDs.

More importantly, the 150 also plays CD-ROM XA (extended-architecture) discs. This capability is important because just about every cool new CD-ROM title uses it for improved performance. The 150 also supports the MPC Level 2, Photo CD multisession, and Plug and Play standards. To use it, you'll need a 386SX or higher processor, 2 MB of RAM, a PCMCIA 2.1 Type II slot, a PCMCIA sound card, Windows 3.1, and a floppy drive.

The Level 2 designation generally classifies the 150 as a "double-speed" player. Average access time is rated at 380 milliseconds (using the "third-stroke benchmark") in its high-speed mode. Switch it to its power-save mode and the laser sled moves more slowly, increasing access time.

The 150 weighs a wispy 10 ounces. To achieve this low weight, it's constructed entirely of plastic—and it's anything but rugged. If you were to drop it more than a couple of feet onto a hard surface, it'd surely be history.

There are jacks for a pair of headphones, line output, and a 6-volt DC power input as well as a headphone

level control. An I/O connector resides on the back of the unit, and there's a compartment for two AA batteries on the bottom. Up top are several controls: play/pause, stop, search, repeat, and play mode/ speed. Finally, an LCD readout shows operating status. Sony provides an AC adaptor, headphones, installation software, an interface cable, and a PCM-CIA interface card.

Installation is pretty easy: Plug the supplied PCMCIA card into your laptop, connect the 150 to the laptop with a supplied cable, and use the laptop's floppy-disc drive to run the install software, which transfers the necessary drivers to the laptop. The software is designed for Windows-based MPC hardware, and *CardWizard* software is on hand to help diagnose any PCMCIA problems.

For this test, I plugged the PCMCIA card into a Compaq laptop. I also plugged a PCMCIA .WAVjammer sound card (not supplied) into the Compaq so that I could listen to the soundtracks on my CD-ROMs. Then I gathered up my toys and caught the next plane to New York.

After reaching cruising altitude, I first spun a music CD. The 150 performed as advertised—and sounded quite good, in fact. Then I powered up my laptop, entered Windows, switched to the sound card, and installed *Monty Python's Complete Waste of Time*. The application ran nicely, with excellent sound and no artifacts or glitches. And the 150 didn't stumble when I switched on the power-saver mode—again, no artifacts or delays. It did skip momentarily if I banged on it (though only if it was accessing data at that moment),

and it resumed playback quickly.

After about 1.5 hours, though, the two AA alkaline batteries gave up the ghost. (This is typical for high-speed operation; playing time is about 2.5 hours when you're just spinning music CDs.) So I inserted a fully charged BP-DM10 rechargeable battery pack (\$25); it kept the 150 up and running with CD-ROMs for another hour (it would have lasted 1.5 hours if I'd simply been listening to music CDs). This is as good as you can do with today's battery technology, but I found the time constraints annoying

SONY PRD-150
Cosmetics
Ease of Use
Performance Value
Circle 130 on reader service card

all the same.

Sony's PRD-150 is a good dual-speed CD-ROM player, and its audio capabilities are excellent. Though its light weight is desirable, durability is, too—the 150 really needs to be more robust. And the battle to slow battery drain on AA cells must be fought and won. Still, the 150 is a terrific accomplishment.

—Ken C. Pohlmann



#### SOFTWIRE

#### WYATT EARP'S OLD WEST

YATT EARP'S OLD WEST IS ONE CD-ROM that truly deserves to be called "edutainment." Essentially a walking tour of Tombstone, Arizona (which has been restored to recreate the post-Civil War era when Earp, his brothers, and "Doc" Holliday ruled the town), Grolier's Earp (\$45) mixes typical gaming fare with in-depth discussions of Old West lifestyles and (of course) a chance to strike it rich. Players have the option of taking the tour as is or spicing it up with random gunfights. (There's also a standalone shootout game, similar to American Laser Games' Mad Dog McCree, that'll let players further fill their coffers.) The educational side of Earp offers some intriguing social commentary, such as the important role that Chinese and Mexican citizens played in Tombstone



Luck of the draw: Wyatt Earp

society and the struggles of some of the women to become financially independent in a town that was, at the time, the epitome of a man's world. One of the main selling points of multimedia has been its ability to grant participants the opportunity to tour great cultural icons like The Louvre, The Pyramids, and The Great Wall of China. We can now add Wyatt Earp's Old West to the roundup. (Windows disc) —Pete Hisey

#### **DANGEROUS CREATURES**

ROM KILLER BEES TO KOMODO dragons, Microsoft's Dangerous Creatures (\$60) spotlights the kinds of scary natural predators that kids love to learn about (and adults can't resist). Creatures' main attraction is its attention to detail. No screen goes by without offering suggestions for your next destination, and you can search for material of interest by way of geographical location, alphabetical index, or a creature's defense mechanisms (jaws. fangs) or habitat (desert, grasslands). You can also take guided tours of sites with intriguing names like "Amazon Adventure" and "Dumb Things People Do." Dangerous Creatures is so intoxicating, in fact, that you shouldn't be at all surprised if you lose track of the time while hanging out with the likes of poison-vine caterpillars and Tasmanian devils. (Windows or Mac disc)

-Ken Korman

#### DARK FORCES

UCASARTS' HIGHLY CINEMATIC DARK Forces (\$60) introduces a new Lucas character to the ever-expanding Star Wars canon: the mercenary Kyle Katarn, who has bailed out of the Empire's legions to join forces with the Rebel Alliance. As Katarn, you are sent on a series of missions, starting with the relatively straightforward theft of the Empire's Death Star plans. But during this particular mission, you run across the Dark Troopers, the Empire's most elite force yet, and somehow you have to get word back to an alreadydevastated Rebel-held world in order to combat this new foe.

Dark Forces really makes its mark with its fabulous graphics, which stand among the best I've ever seen in an action game—they bring to mind the scope and fluidity of the Star Wars movies themselves. Spaceships zoom, lasers literally scream off of metal walls, the aliens are totally creepy, and the sewer system in Level 2 is so disgusting you can almost smell it. In the bad-news department, the game only offers 15 levels, compared to the 25 or 30 that are standard in top-of-the-line games like Doom and Descent. On the other hand, it could still take a few months (yes, months) just to get past Level 10 even if you start at the lowest skill level. And, unlike many of the other role-playing games I've encountered, the missions here actually become increasingly intricate as the game progresses; screw up just once and



Stormtroopin': Dark Forces

you'll have to repeat the entire mission. A few hints: Stick to the darkest areas of each room, use the element of surprise to your advantage, and always remember to turn off your headlamp before walking through any passageway. May the Forces be with you. (MPC

#### **ASTRONOMICA**

F LIFE FEELS LIKE A WALK THROUGH a maze under a star-filled sky-or if you'd like it to feel that way-then Hyper-Quest's Astronomica (\$70) is the CD-ROM for you. Here you happily volunteer to break into the SkyQuest science institute in order to help Sarah, the QuickTime gal who's asked you to locate her eccentric MIA professorfather, Dr. Mayer. The good doctor may have inadvertently accelerated the end of the universe with his top-secret Astronomica project, so you need to get SkyQuest's supercomputer back online to assess the damage. You do this by clicking your way around the 3-D exploratorium and resetting its exhibits by solving astronomy-related interactive puzzles and playing arcade games, which have names like "Interplanetary Pinball" and "Backwards Time Viewer." If you're stumped, assistance is always at hand from two of history's most eminent scientists-Albert Einstein and Galileo-as well as an informative interactive encyclopedia. While it's a great disc for fueling interest in its core subject matter, Astronomica may occasionally prove frustrating if your main goals are to get back together with Sarah and solve the mystery before the whole damn place blows up. (Windows or Mac disc)

—Josef Krebs

# GLASS ACT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

only company that plans to introduce widescreen sets this year. The 34-inch WT-3650 (\$5,000) and the 30-inch WT-3250 (\$2,700) should be available now.

#### SAMSUNG

Top performance features are trickling down to truly affordable sets, as Samsung's new models prove. The company's four 27- and one 31-inch directview models offer dark-tint picture tubes. All of the sets, including the 31inch TXC3135 (\$1,099) and the 27-inch TXB2735 (\$619), also feature comb filters. Absent are features like color-temperature controls and picture-enhancement circuits, since these extras, Samsung says, would hike prices unacceptably. As one of the first companies to offer StarSight in a VCR, however, Samsung plans to add the guide to one or more sets later this year.

#### SHARP

The top Sharp sets are part of the Cinema Select series, which includes five big-screen direct-view models. The best of these sets, the 31-inch 31GX1200 (\$1,299) and 35-inch 35GX1200 (\$1,899), includes a digital comb filter and velocity-modulation scanning. Dark-tint tubes are standard in all of Sharp's big-screen models, and every big direct-view set the company makes (save the two already mentioned) employs a glass comb filter. The company continues to offer the widescreen, 34inch 34W1000 (\$3,499), and 31- as well as 35-inch TV/VCRs with StarSight guides are on the way.

A recognized leader in LCD technology, Sharp is developing increasingly larger flat-panel displays. Though we won't see a 27-inch or larger LCD panel for several years, the company's goal "is to offer [an affordable] 21-inch flat panel by the year 2000" with comparable screen performance to a CRT, says Bruce Pollack, Sharp's national marketing manager for LCD products.

#### SONY

The Sony name is forever linked to their picture-tube technology: Trinitron. Though it debuted in 1968, it's not ancient history—the Trinitron concept continually evolves to incorporate ad-



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vances. Sony says that the basis of Trinitron technology is their electron gun, aperture grill, and vertically flat screen; the company says that no other screen in use is truly flat in the vertical dimension.

Sony maintains that the Super Trinitron tubes used in their top-drawer XBR<sup>2</sup> sets are also the flattest, horizontally, on the market. Also unique to the XBR<sup>2</sup> line is the SuperBrix electron gun; thanks to a long focal length and large-diameter focusing, the gun is said to create a very small beam spot. Other XBR<sup>2</sup> features are extended-range phosphors, which are said to reproduce especially bright reds and deep blues, and a titanium-dioxide layer, for boosting picture brightness.

The company's Deep Black Screen, a dark-tint type, is now featured in all 27- and 32-inch Trinitron models and in all 27-inch XBR models. Comb filters are built into all of Sony's bigscreen direct-views, with digital combs in the XBR line. All of Sony's direct-views also feature Dynamic Picture circuitry: It continually adjusts the picture to balance light and dark values within scenes

Sony's current direct-view models don't offer direct color-temperature adjustment. (Some Sony projection models do.) Several XBRs and XBR<sup>2</sup>s do include dynamic color circuitry, dubbed Trinitone, for selecting warmer or cooler whites without, according to Sony, affecting flesh tones.

Finally, Sony hints that a new XBR line is in the works. The upgraded models, which are expected to hit A/V shops this summer, will include a new chassis and the Deep Black Screen. The company is also in the thick of things regarding DVD as the cosponsor of the Sony/Philips format, and Sony DSS gear should be in stores now. Will Sony, with all of its digital clout, build TVs for the 1996 or 1997 model year that incorporate these new technologies? Time will tell.

#### **THOMSON**

For the uninitiated, Thomson is the parent company of RCA, ProScan, and GE. The most technically advanced products in the Thomson family are grouped under the ProScan banner, followed by RCA's Home Theater line. When you add in RCA's mainstream

ColorTrak line and the company's GE models (all of which feature dark-tint glass, and some have comb filtering), you have the largest offering of direct-view models across the board. The line-up includes two holdover 34-inch Cinema-Screen widescreen models, Pro-Scan's PS34190 and RCA's G34170AT (both \$3,999).

Many 27- and 35-inch ProScan sets, including the 35-inch PS35190 (\$2,999), have a "flat" tube with the Invar Shadow Mask, This same tube package is also available in the top model in RCA's Home Theater line, the 35-inch F35760MB (\$2,199), Other models, including the new 32-inch screen size debuting in both series, rely on Thomson's 110-degree VHP (very high performance) reduced-depth tube. Various dark-tint tubes are featured in the ProScan and Home Theater lines. All ProScan and Home Theater TVs feature comb filters; high-end ProScans incorporate digital comb filtering.

Most ProScan and Home Theater sets also incorporate a new high-performance chassis. One of its capabilities is automatic color balance, which uses an onboard chip to monitor and adjust col-

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or temperature as well as optimize black-level. In addition, special circuitry works at correcting picture noise. Users can also set the color temperature on these models to 10,000, 9,300, or 7,500 degrees Kelvin; an authorized technician can calibrate the sets for 6,500-degree pictures.

But there's more: The new chassis incorporates velocity-scan modulation for noise reduction. Sets with this chassis also receive XDS signals. And a new bit-mapped on-screen navigation system for accessing operating and setup functions, found on high-end Pro-Scans, stars Nipper, Thomson's undeniably cute canine mascot. (A version of this graphic interface will also be incorporated in the next generation of the company's DSS receivers.)

Buoyed by its impressive rollout of DSS, Thomson is aggressively pursuing all types of digital video technology. The company is being very bullish about MPEG-2 digital-video compression, which is even now being phased into the DSS infrastructure and will be central to other new technologies the company is actively supporting: HDTV, the Toshiba/Time Warner DVD, and the D-VHS bitstream recorder.

"With new technology, including MPEG decoding, transforming the TV set into a full digital chassis," says Joseph Clayton, Thomson's executive vice president, "the TV receiver will soon begin to act like today's microcomputer." Thomson has shown prototypes of TVs that incorporate DSS receivers, and they're likely to offer such models for sale within the next few years. Other packages may include TV/DVD and TV/D-VHS hybrids.

Finally, HDTV is high on Thomson's list of priorities; the company plans to have working HDTV sets ready by 1997. At the same time, Thomson also expects to sell lower-priced digital sets that deliver standard definition, probably via MPEG-2 decoding.

#### **TOSHIBA**

All of Toshiba's new 31- and 35-inch Cinema Series models feature an Invar Shadow Mask, and a dark-tint tube is available in virtually every big-screen set the company offers. In the flat-screen race, Toshiba maintains that its 35-inch tube—found in models costing \$1,399 to \$2,299—is the flattest in the world. Three varieties of comb filters are in Toshiba's arsenal: basic glass, CCD (in many 32-inch and larger mod-

els), and digital (in some 35-inchers). And color-temperature controls, which include a 6,500-degree setting, can be found in several models.

Toshiba's digital chassis, first introduced 2 years ago in high-end Super-Tube models, is now sprinkled throughout the entire line. The chassis uses a microprocessor to continuously monitor and adjust all aspects of performance. (The processor works in similar fashion to the artificial-intelligence cir-

cuitry found in the sets offered by other companies.)

As is the case with many of their peers, Toshiba is putting their widescreen technology only into rear-projection sets. Though their U.S. operations include a plant that makes 4:3 picture tubes, Toshiba (also like their peers) doesn't build 16:9 CRTs here—and importing widescreen tubes from Japan, says Craig Eggers, the company's product manager for color TV, is

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too expensive given the current strength of the Japanese yen.

The company has no formal plans to build StarSight or GuidePlus+ into their sets. But all models with screen sizes of 27 inches and above include XDS, which the company calls EDS.

Toshiba already has one foot firmly planted in the future. The TIMM (Toshiba Integrated Multimedia Monitor; \$999) has a 20-inch screen, a VGA input, and a remote control that orchestrates TV functions as well as a number of multimedia operations. "We see more multimedia functions making their way to big screens," Eggers pre-

That might be just the beginning. As the major technology partner in the Toshiba/Time Warner DVD format, the company surely must be thinking of building DVD players into TV sets. And Toshiba is one of the newest DSS licensees

ZENITH

The top models in Zenith's directview line incorporate Advanced Video Imaging (AVI) circuitry, a performance-boosting package said to deliver richer colors, higher contrast, and improved picture sharpness. Digital comb filters are used in the 32- and 35-inch AVI models, with glass combs in the family's 27-inch sets—such as the SM2789BT (see "Shortware," page 49)—as well as in mid-level System 3

Invar tubes are available in all 32inch AVI and System 3 models as well as in select 35-inch sets. Wideband video amplification boosts horizontal resolution in both series. Dark glass is used in all of Zenith's new big-screen models, including the entry-level Sentry series. AVI models also feature COOL and WARM color-temperature settings, which spec out at 8,500 and 6,500 degrees Kelvin, respectively. Though Zenith hasn't redesigned its chassis for the 1995-96 model year, the company has made a chassis modification in higher-end sets: The electron beam is driven harder, to improve color reproduction.

As part of its commitment to Star-Sight (the company debuted the first StarSight TV in 1994), Zenith has upgraded its control system. Available on the higher-end models in the AVI line, StarSight is now controlled by a neat remote called Z-Trak. Taking a design cue from portable computers, Z-Trak features a track ball and a 10-button keypad that lets viewers address virtually every operation of the TV set, including a new and improved StarSight. The net result is an enhanced level of interactivity with the on-screen guide. Instead of pressing buttons to move through the grid, for example, viewers simply scroll up and down or left and right by moving the track ball; pop-up menus can be activated by clicking the track ball.

Also new this year in Zenith's Star-Sight models is "picture in grid" (which may become known as PIG): It exploits the set's PIP capability by displaying a live channel in a window within a "page" of StarSight's onscreen guide. Another StarSight enhancement, called "time jump," lets viewers jump from listings at one hour to those at another—to move instantly from listings for 5 p.m. to those for 11 p.m., for example, simply enter 11 on the Z-Trak keypad.

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Next year, Zenith expects to incorporate AT&T's TV Information Center into some of their big-screen sets. In its current incarnation as a set-top box, the system receives news, weather, phone messages, and stock updates via standard phone lines and displays it all on the screen of a conventional TV. In 1997, Zenith is likely to introduce a TV with a built-in DVD player; the company expects that player to follow the Toshiba/Time Warner spec. And, as a major proponent of HDTV, Zenith has pledged that they'll be one of the first companies to offer an HDTV set.

# DIVIDE

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35** 

comparison test of 12 stereo models]. Your essential choices regarding home theater are whether to run with two or three two-channel (stereo) models or one three-, four-, five-, or six-channel (multichannel) model. The benefits you get from dividing preamp and processor circuitry into separate chassis also apply to amplifiers: When you give a product its own chassis and power supply, it won't be bothered by anything going on in another chassis. On the other hand, I've tested several very nice multichannel amplifiers recently. In any case, separate amps (including multichannel models from reputable manufacturers) are often rated more strictly than the amps built into receivers and, therefore, can be relied upon to pump out everything their specs lead you to expect. [For evidence, see "Take Five," page 51.] Makers of affordable highquality amps include Acurus, Adcom, B&K, Bryston, Carver, Denon, Harman Kardon, Marantz, NAD, Parasound, Proton, and Rotel.

You should also audition at least one THX-approved amp, whether or not you intend to go with a THX processor and/or THX-certified speakers. There's no equalization involved here; it's just that THX's guidelines for amp performance are quite strict and are based on a sound technical foundation. Many venerable amp manufacturers don't take kindly to THX's "intervention" in their niche, however; some say that they've been doing what THX espouses (and much more) for years. That certainly is true in some cases, but don't write THX

off as just a Hollywood upstart—as I've said, their guidelines are generally on target.

The amplifier question raises another issue. One temptation when buying separates is to buy every component for a system from a single manufacturer. It's an attractive idea—the components will be cosmetically similar, and they should integrate well. But if you limit yourself to one manufacturer, you'll negate one of the prime reasons for going with sep-

arates in the first place: the ability to choose *exactly* what you need.

Say Company A has just the preamp/ processor you crave: It has the right number of inputs and outputs, the right controls, a superior Pro Logic decoder, and great overall sound. But then you find out that Company A only sells twochannel power amplifiers and, since you know that you need a powered subwoofer, you really only need a fivechannel amp—not three stereo models.







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Company B has a great five-channel amp, but their preamp/processor doesn't excite you. Don't worry: mix and match. That's what separates are all

This whimsical little example only hints at the labyrinthine options and considerations that hover about the question of building a separates-based home theater. And many of them concern amplification. The line of demarcation between a system based on separates and one based on an A/V receiver really is pretty hazy. Is a two-component system—say, a preamp/processor and a five- or six-channel power amplifier-a system of separates . . . or an A/V receiver in two boxes? How much more "separate" are three two-channel power amps than two three-channel amps-or a six-channel amp, for that matter? Are you betraying the separates ideal if you don't buy six mono amplifiers? Where does one draw the line?

AS ALWAYS, ONE DOES WHAT ONE DOESwe encounter choices such as these every time we prepare to make an expensive purchase: We see what's out there, consider what we need, juggle some options, and then choose. As I mentioned at the outset, there are more choices to make when building a separates-based system. You'll probably find that an A/V receiver is easier to buy. And most people find receivers more convenient to use. But well designed separates offer several key advantages—flexibility, upgradability, nicer cosmetics, and, in many cases, better sound—over most receivers, and they may be enough to make you take the plunge. Uncommonly good hometheater sound is out there. We've told you where to look and how to listen. Get busy-we'll put a TV dinner up for

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 41** 

master volume was set extremely high and a movie segued to a very quiet scene, the hum from my LD player's motor virtually drowned it out.

The 1000 did an excellent job with video. It was almost perfectly transparent, image-wise, whether its S-Video or composite connections were in use. The only observable change, in fact, was an almost imperceptible softening of black-level and brightness. While hardcore videophiles might find this change unacceptable, most people will find the 1000's primary convenience benefit—one-component audio/video source selection—hard to beat.

I wasn't entirely seduced by the 1000's ergonomics. Controls are logical and work very well from a performance standpoint, but I really had a hard time with the front panel's small gold-onblack graphics, which proved hard to read even in good light. I also missed a front-panel (or on-screen) display; LEDs light up to show what you've selected, but from across the room they're just green lights.

I also wasn't fond of the 1000's remote. It's small, and its 24 keys are identically sized and shaped. To its credit, the remote segregates the MAS-TER, CENTER, and REAR up/down volume buttons, but it's still all too easy to accidentally hit the CENTER volume keys when you're looking for MASTER. Speaking of volume, adjusting it via the remote is tough because the motor-driven control runs very quickly.

NONE OF THESE COMPLAINTS HAVE anything even remotely to do with audio/video performance, of course, and it's worth repeating that Parasound's P/SP-1000 is a terrific performer. Check it out if you're looking for something special in home-theater control and surround decoding. In terms of sheer performance and flexibility for the dollar, it has a very small circle of peers.

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 44** 

Diary"), the touching new Italian film by Nanni Moretti, who won the Best Director award at the 1994 Cannes Film Festival.

In Caro Diario, one of the main characters wears a bright orange jacket during a scene that takes place on the volcanic island of Stromboli. Noticing that the orange had a bit more chroma noise

than I wanted to see, I thought that this was the perfect opportunity to give the Mits' digital video-noise reduction a stress test. I pressed the remote's V-DNR button and, sure enough, the picture noise decreased a bit at this, the circuit's standard setting. Then I moved in for the kill: I pressed the button again, which accessed the variable noise-reduction mode. In this mode, the shuttle dial sets the degree of reduction; there are even separate adjustments available for luminance and chroma. I cranked the chroma-noise reduction all the way up to maximum and . . . voilà!-the chroma noise in the orange jacket, visible as a flashing vibrancy, virtually disappeared. Best of all, this was accomplished without any reduction in apparent detail or overall color saturation. Bravo.

While I was researching this circuit, Lancelot Braithwaite, VIDEO's technical editor, noted that it has a potential downside: There could be a slight loss of chroma detail, in which subtle variations such as flesh tones get averaged out. But I saw no such problems. Note that the V7057's video-noise reduction had no effect on a theoretically perfect recording (like a test pattern).

On the audio side, the V7057 includes playback of the usual digital and CX analog audio tracks. It also has AC-3-detection circuitry, which routes AC-3 signals to its RF output when an AC-3-encoded disc is spinning (such discs also include conventional analog and digital tracks, and they're handled in standard fashion). The remote's AU-DIO COMPRESS button brings up a calibrated on-screen display that can reduce digital output level by up to 25 dB in 1-dB increments; analog audio output remains unchanged.

The Direct CD feature is a real convenience when playing music CDs, saving both time and the need to keep the area in front of the laserdisc tray clear. And the sound was very good across the board—not surprising, since the digital audio section employs a respectable 1-bit D/A converter. The V7057 also includes both coaxial and optical digital-output jacks, making it universally compatible with any preamp or A/V receiver that has digital-input jacks (and ideal for digital dubbing with DAT, MD, or DCC audio recorders as well). Other back-panel jacks include two S-Videos and two composite videos.

You'll also be pleased to hear that

measurements of video performance were among the best we've ever seen: Horizontal resolution (415 lines) was just shy of the limit of the LD format, and all signal-to-noise ratios were excellent, especially in the chroma (color) department. As far as video is concerned, the V7057 sizzles.

MITSUBISHI'S M-V7057 IS A TRULY TOPnotch laserdisc player, and it should fulfill the needs of the most demanding viewer—even into the future, thanks to its AC-3-ready features. Mitsubishi has been making LD players for many years now, and that experience shows. The V7057 really comes very close to perfection. Satisfy your videophile longings.

# **VIDEOTEST**

YAMAHA RX-V690

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 47** 

improvement over previous Cinema DSP incarnations): Neither mode muddles the clarity of center-channel dialogue. Both modes do increase the overall brightness of the sound a bit (70MM more so than ENHANCED)—not disturbingly so, but perceptibly. Noise picks up very slightly as well. For big action flicks, I rather liked ENHANCED, but I generally ended up sticking with regular Pro Logic— which the V690 performed quite excellently.

The additional surround modes include four for music (CONCERT HALL, CHURCH, JAZZ CLUB, and ROCK CON-CERT) as well as STADIUM, SPORTS, and TV THEATER. Most of these proved usable in their eponymous settings, to various degrees. For pure-music listening, JAZZ CLUB was the pick of the litter. And TV THEATER did a good job of enlivening Dolby-less programming, though it was a touch heavy on the reverb. The CONCERT HALL mode sounded very good, but its surround channel stood out more than I liked. Both STA-DIUM and CHURCH load up on echo and reverberation—realistically so, I suppose. (No one trekked to see The Beatles for Shea Stadium's acoustics. . . .)

Level adjustments really can't help out here. They're stored globally, so you can't set front/center/rear balance independently for each mode, which

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Ken Crane's LaserDisc 15251 Beach Blvd. Westminster, CA 92683 would be very helpful in making the music modes more . . . well, musical. (In this, the V690 is far from unique; why more manufacturers don't provide this relatively simple but powerful extra is a mystery to me.) In addition, and unlike several higher-priced Cinema DSP models, the V690 doesn't provide control over surround parameters (other than delay).

Onward and upward: Surround-mode amplifier power proved sturdy. The

three 80-watt front channels were solid, punchy, and refined. Soundtracks were reproduced with excellent dynamics and clarity, even with the master volume cranked. And though big effects at peak levels caused the V690's surround channels to audibly strain, they did just fine at reasonably sane levels. (In a large room or with especially inefficient surround speakers, a surround-channel power upgrade may be advisable.) In two-channel stereo, the V690's onboard

amplification was just out-and-out impressive: It was open, detailed, and dynamic, and seemed quite effortless on deep-bass transients and big dynamic events. The output was also extremely quiet. (I've been testing receivers for years, and I'm *still* amazed by how good the better ones sound.)

The V690 also has a good tuner. With strong to very strong FM signals, in fact, it was an amazing FM source, with low-distortion, wide-bandwidth, spacious, and dynamic sound that was nothing short of outstanding with high-quality broadcasts. It also did a good job of plucking only moderately strong stations out of the ether at my rural location with clean-enough sound. Fringe signals were received with only ordinary quality, however, and AM performance was just fair.

YOU CAN SPEND MUCH LESS ON AN A/V receiver these days, and you can spend much more—on either a top-shelf A/V receiver or a separates package. But Yamaha's RX-V690 strikes a balance of which any gourmet would approve. If you're in the market for a high-performance A/V receiver that won't bust your budget, make tracks for your local A/V shop and get yourself an audition. But call ahead first—they might take reservations.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 72

Nichols' earthshaking early period, including 1968's *The Graduate* and 1971's *Carnal Knowledge*, and his conventional modern-day output, such as 1988's *Working Girl* and 1994's *Wolf.*) This new transfer is a huge improvement over *Silkwood*'s VHS incarnations, and the 1.9:1 letterboxed images afford breathing room for this intense if claustrophobic character study. — *KK* 

#### A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

NLY A HALF-HOUR INTO A NIGHT to Remember (The Criterion Collection; CLV/CAV discs, \$100), a 1958 British docudrama, the most famous iceberg in history has, without a great deal of fuss, sidled by the Titanic, left its deadly mark, and doomed 1,500 of the ship's 2,200 passengers. Remember, which is based on historical materials



and interviews with survivors that first appeared in a book by Walter Lord, wisely underplays the drama of the event at hand. Passenger reaction to the imminence of death ranges from those who claw for dear life to those who choose the proper attire for their death. Shocking revelations, like the fact that valets were expected to go down with their charges or that the steerage passengers were allowed on deck only after the lifeboats were lowered, are un-

#### **LABELS FOR LESS**

Summer love comes to town in every conceivable form-from filial to phantom, undying to dying, young to too young, and Platonic to Sapphic. To wit: Fox Lorber issues a passport to foreign-movie love with In the Realm of the Senses, In the Realm of Passion, Red Kiss, Don Juan My Love, Amor Bandido, I'm the One You're Looking For. Dona Flora and Her Two Husbands, Letters From the Park, The Story of Boys and Girls, Luzia, and 36 Fillette (\$20 each). Paramount champions all-American love with This Thing Called Love, What's Eating Gilbert Grape (\$20 each), Daisy Miller, A Place in the Sun, The Last Tycoon (\$15 each), and Paper Moon Special Edition (\$30), while Warner accents Streep-love



Cut, print: In the Realm of the Senses

with The French Lieutenant's Woman, Defending Your Life, and A Cry in the Dark (\$15 each). Columbia TriStar serves up some painful love lessons with The Razor's Edge and Me & Veronica (\$15 each), while Fox Lorber offers the love that has no name in The Crush, The Hours and the Times, The Garden, Poison, The Funny Tape, For Lost Soldier, Stonewall 25 (\$20 each), and Claire of the Moon (\$30). And then there's the love that inspired men to give up their seats for women in FoxVideo's Titanic (\$20). Bottoms up.

veiled with an economy that heightens the tragedy's full emotional power. The 1.66:1 black-and-white print absolutely glistens, and the monaural sound is as crisp and convincing as the acting. Extras include a 1993 documentary on the making of the movie, separate audiotrack commentary from Titanic historians, and both the British and American theater trailers. All in all, *Remember* illuminates a tragedy that should never be forgotten.

—JK



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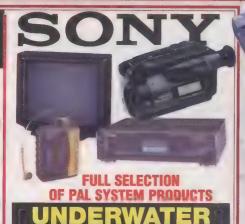
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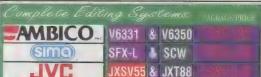
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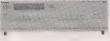


Available for most camcorders!

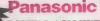
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ESK	CT-1384VY	13" w/ tuner
国	CT-2083Y	20" video monitor
Ā	CT-2084VY	20" w/ tuner
		A/V MIXERS
	WJ-MX30	digital field synch.

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MX-1	digital mixer
TM-2000	TitleMaker 2000
VE-1	
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SE-1	. Special Effects Mixer
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MONITORS

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V-\$770	Super VHS
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PV-\$770	Super VHS
TV/VC	CR COMBO
PV-M1324	13" combo
PV-M1345	13" w/4Head VCR
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PV-IQ304	449.99	499.99	539.99	609.99	749.99	949.991054.99
PV-IQ244	529.99	579.99	619.99	689.99	829.99	1029.991154.99
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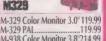
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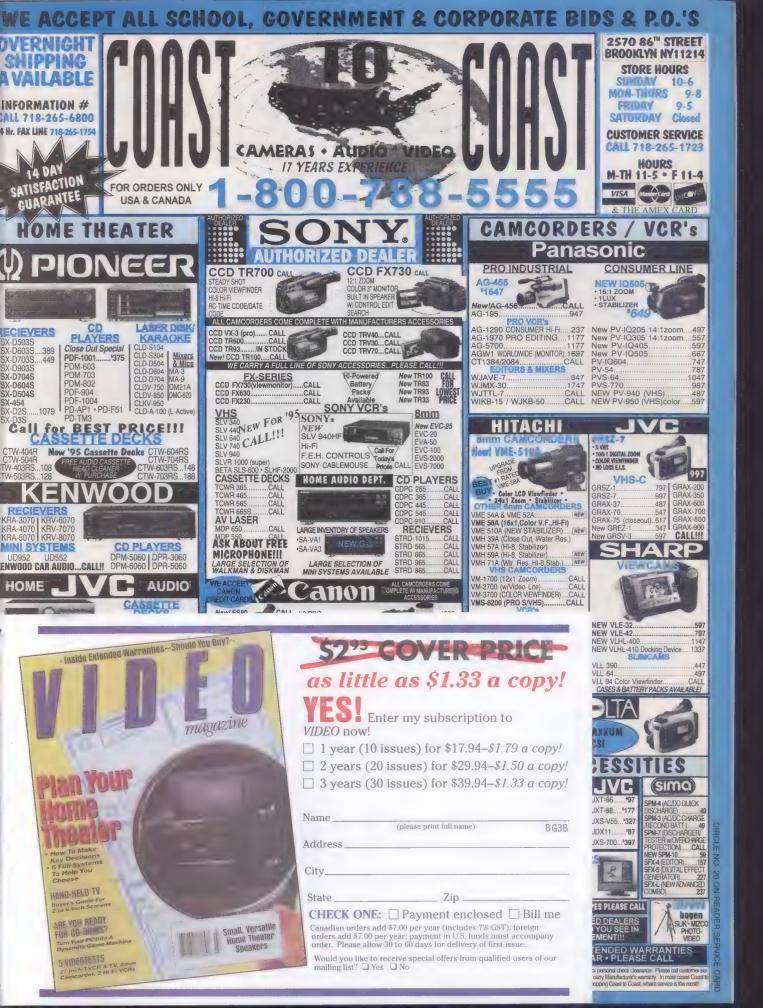






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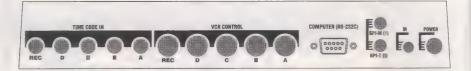
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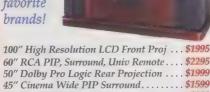
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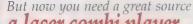


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20"-25" A□ 25"-27" B□ 27"-32" C□ 35"+ D□ 2. Approximately how many hours per day do you watch TV? G

F E 3-5 6-10 3. How far in advance do you plan your TV viewing?

1 day 1 week J No Planning K H

4. Do you tape "series" programming (i.e. soap operas, mini-series)? No M

5. Which sources do you use to plan TV viewing?

Daily Newspaper N Cable Guide O Weekly Newspaper Insert P TV Guide Q Other R

6. How many programs do you tape per week? 7+ U 

7. If programming your VCR was made easier would you record additional shows? Yes V No W

8. Are you currently a subscriber to VIDEO?

Yes X No Y		Yes	X	No	Y
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Name
Address
CityStateZip
Telephone Number (with Area Code)
1. What size is your primary viewing TV? 20"-25" A□ 25"-27" B□ 27"-32" C□ 35"+ D□
2. Approximately how many hours per day do you watch TV?  0-2 E 3-5 F 6-10 G
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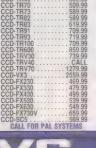


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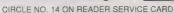
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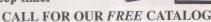
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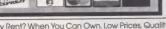




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# **Opportunity knocks for** Seagram Co. and Universal Pictures

# HOUSE OF SPIRITS

HEN SEAGRAM CO., THE CANADIAN PURVEYOR OF whiskey, wine, and Tropicana juices, recently purchased controlling interest in MCA from Matsushita, the Japanese electronics giant (itself the parent of Panasonic, Technics, and JVC). opportunity knocked. MCA's Universal Studios certainly should come in handy when Seagram, distributor of Mumm's champagne as well as 230 brands of distilled spirits and nearly 200 brands of wines, tries to recoup its outlay. Crafty product placement should do the trick.

Even a first-year marketing major would see the logic of using computerized special effects to plant a few bottles of Captain Morgan rum into Universal's The Pirates of Penzance (1983). In The Sting (1973), the ubiquitous bottles of gin laid out before Robert Redford and Paul Newman could magically become Seagram's Extra Dry. The drinking habits of college students worldwide could be inexorably altered by showing John Belushi chugging a quart of VO Crown Royal instead of bourbon when the Deltas are thrown out of National Lampoon's Animal House (1978). And the next time you

**I** never

drink . . . Gallo.

see the original Dracula (1931), Bela Lugosi, as the

intone "I never drink . . . wineunless it's a Monterey Vineyard chardonnay."

We can assume, however, that Universal is unlikely to be asked to remake The Lost Weekend (1945) or The Days of Wine and Roses (1962). After all, Seagram now has its own library of pro-drinking movies. And never forget that Universal was

ageless Count, just might

the studio that gave free rein to W.C. Fields. If Edgar Bronfman Jr., Seagram's president and chief executive officer, doesn't have a suitable Fields epigram or two emblazoned on his office wall, he's in the wrong business. (Suggestion: "A woman drove me to drink. I never had the courtesy to thank her for it.")

But we're just getting started: How about a new round of brand-awareness commercials starring Universal's cast of lovable lushes? Who could be better than

Jimmy Stewart as Elwood P. Dowd, tipster-about-town and best friend of that 6-foot-tall invisible rabbit Harvey (1950)? Or Cary Grant as the soused beachcomber who's forced to deal with a small tribe of French schoolgirls and their intolerant teacher (Leslie Caron) in Father Goose (1964)? A dash of sex should help with those liberal late-night audiences, and sex and liquor were never mixed more expertly than when Marlene Dietrich sang "See What the Boys in the Back Room Will Have" in Destry Rides

With Universal's help, Seagram can also reach across economic boundaries. While the movie studio can't lay claim to the "Thin Man" series, it did produce the William Powell classic My Man Godfrey (1936), which, like any self-respecting screwball comedy, proves that the idle rich are generally toast all day long. At the other end of the spectrum, Universal also produced the "Ma and Pa Kettle" series, though it'd be tough to persuade audiences that

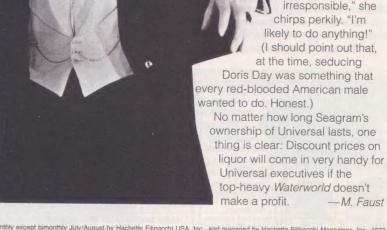
there was anything but home brew in Pa Kettle's ever-present jug.

Seagram's hopes are best realized, however, in Lover Come Back (1961), the second in the series of Rock Hudson-Doris Day comedies that ruled the box offices in the late '50s. There's not a single

character who isn't shown drunk at some point. And not only does all of Rock's life and career (as an ad executive, ironically) revolve around drinking (it's his secret for

getting clients to sign on the dotted line), it almost helps him bed Doris. the perennial film virgin. "Even one little glass of champagne and I

become completely irresponsible," she chirps perkily. "I'm likely to do anything!"



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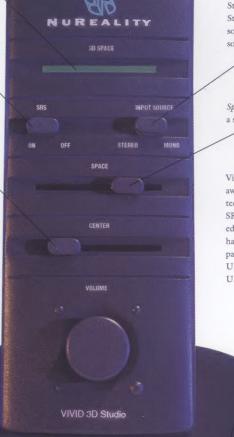
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